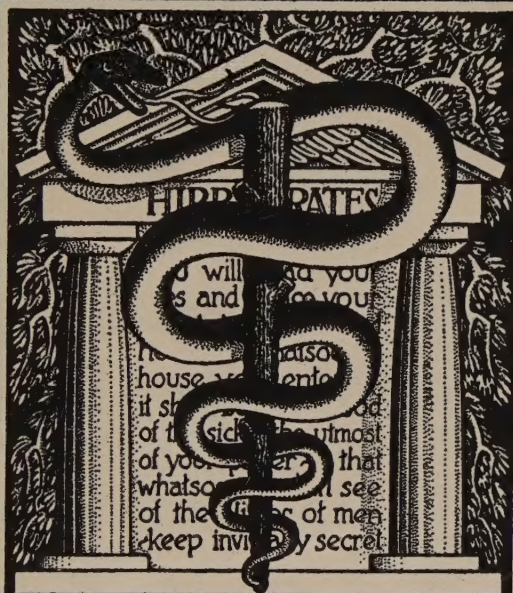


Adventurers All

By JOHN BUCHAN



ELIOT SNOW

MD

Adventurers All

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MR. DICKSON MCCUNN

THEY HAD ALL POETRY IN THEM, AND THE HEROIC,
AND A GREAT UNWORLDLINESS. THEIR LIVES
WERE LIKE OUR WEATHER — STORM AND SUN.

THE RUNAGATES CLUB



CONTAINING

Huntingtower John Macnab
The Three Hostages

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY — BOSTON

The Riverside Press Cambridge

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TO
W. P. KER

If the Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford has not forgotten the rock whence he was hewn, this simple story may give him an hour of entertainment. I offer it to you because I think you have met my friend Dickson McCunn, and I dare to hope that you may even in your many sojournings in the Westlands have encountered one or other of the Gorbals Die-Hards. If you share my kindly feeling for Dickson, you will be interested in some facts which I have lately ascertained about his ancestry. In his veins there flows a portion of the redoubtable blood of the Nicol Jarvies. When the Bailie, you remember, returned from his journey to Rob Roy beyond the Highland Line, he espoused his housekeeper Mattie, "an honest man's daughter and a near cousin o' the Laird o' Limmerfield." The union was blessed with a son, who succeeded to the Bailie's business and in due course begat daughters, one of whom married a certain Ebenezer McCunn, of whom there is record in the archives of the Hammermen of Glasgow. Ebenezer's grandson, Peter by name, was Provost of Kirkintilloch, and his second son was the father of my hero by his marriage with Robina Dickson, eldest daughter of one Robert Dickson, a tenant-farmer in the Lennox. So there are coloured threads in Mr. McCunn's pedigree, and, like the Bailie, he can count kin, should he wish, with Rob Roy himself through "the auld wife ayont the fire at Stuckavrallachan."

Such as it is, I dedicate to you the story, and ask for no better verdict on it than that of that profound critic of life and literature, Mr. Huckleberry Finn, who observed of the Pilgrim's Progress, that he "considered the statements interesting, but steep."

J. B.

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Huntingtower

HUNTINGTOWER

PROLOGUE

THE girl came into the room with a darting movement like a swallow, looked round her with the same birdlike quickness, and then ran across the polished floor to where a young man sat on a sofa with one leg laid along it.

"I have saved you this dance, Quentin," she said, pronouncing the name with a pretty staccato. "You must be so lonely not dancing, so I will sit with you. What shall we talk about?"

The young man did not answer at once, for his gaze was held by her face. He had never dreamed that the gawky and rather plain little girl whom he had romped with long ago in Paris would grow into such a being. The clean delicate lines of her figure, the exquisite pure colouring of hair and skin, the charming young arrogance of the eyes—this was beauty, he reflected, a miracle, a revelation. Her virginal fineness and her dress, which was the tint of pale fire, gave her the air of a creature of ice and flame.

"About yourself, please, Saskia," he said. "Are you happy now that you are a grown-up lady?"

"Happy!" Her voice had a thrill in it like music,

frosty music. "The days are far too short. I grudge the hours when I must sleep. They say it is sad for me to make my *début* in a time of war. But the world is very kind to me, and after all it is a victorious war for our Russia. And listen to this, Quentin. To-morrow I am to be allowed to begin nursing at the Alexander Hospital. What do you think of that?"

The time was January, 1916, and the place a room in the great Nirski Palace. No hint of war, no breath from the snowy streets, entered that curious chamber where Prince Peter Nirski kept some of the chief of his famous treasures. It was notable for its lack of drapery and upholstering—only a sofa or two and a few fine rugs on the cedar floor. The walls were of a green marble veined like malachite, the ceiling was of darker marble inlaid with white intaglios. Scattered everywhere were tables and cabinets laden with celadon china, and carved jade, and ivories, and shimmering Persian and Rhodian vessels. In all the room there was scarcely anything of metal and no touch of gilding or bright colour. The light came from green alabaster censers, and the place swam in a cold green radiance like some cavern below the sea. The air was warm and scented, and though it was very quiet there, a hum of voices and the strains of dance music drifted to it from the pillared corridor in which could be seen the glare of lights from the great ballroom beyond.

The young man had a thin face with lines of suffering round the mouth and eyes. The warm room

had given him a high colour, which increased his air of fragility. He felt a little choked by the place, which seemed to him for both body and mind a hot-house, though he knew very well that the Nirski Palace on this gala evening was in no way typical of the land or its masters. Only a week ago he had been eating black bread with its owner in a hut on the Volhynian front.

"You have become amazing, Saskia," he said. "I won't pay my old playfellow compliments; besides, you must be tired of them. I wish you happiness all the day long like a fairy-tale Princess. But a crock like me can't do much to help you to it. The service seems to be the wrong way round, for here you are wasting your time talking to me."

She put her hand on his. "Poor Quentin! Is the leg very bad?"

He laughed. "Oh, no. It's mending famously. I'll be able to get about without a stick in another month, and then you've got to teach me all the new dances."

The jigging music of a two-step floated down the corridor. It made the young man's brow contract, for it brought to him a vision of dead faces in the gloom of a November dusk. He had once had a friend who used to whistle that air, and he had seen him die in the Hollebeke mud. There was something *macabre* in the tune. . . . He was surely morbid this evening, for there seemed something *macabre* about the house, the room, the dancing, all Russia. . . . These last days he had suffered from a sense of calamity impending, of a dark curtain

drawing down upon a splendid world. They didn't agree with him at the Embassy, but he could not get rid of the notion.

The girl saw his sudden abstraction.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked. It had been her favourite question as a child.

"I was thinking that I rather wished you were still in Paris."

"But why?"

"Because I think you would be safer."

"Oh, what nonsense, Quentin dear! Where should I be safe if not in my own Russia, where I have friends—oh, so many, and tribes and tribes of relations? It is France and England that are unsafe with the German guns grumbling at their doors. . . . My complaint is that my life is too cosseted and padded. I am too secure, and I do not want to be secure."

The young man lifted a heavy casket from a table at his elbow. It was of dark green imperial jade, with a wonderfully carved lid. He took off the lid and picked up three small oddments of ivory—a priest with a beard, a tiny soldier and a draught-ox. Putting the three in a triangle, he balanced the jade box on them.

"Look, Saskia! If you were living inside that box you would think it very secure. You would note the thickness of the walls and the hardness of the stone, and you would dream away in a peaceful green dusk. But all the time it would be held up by trifles—brittle trifles."

She shook her head. "You do not understand.

You cannot understand. We are a very old and strong people with roots deep, deep in the earth."

"Please God you are right," he said. "But, Saskia, you know that if I can ever serve you, you have only to command me. Now I can do no more for you than the mouse for the lion—at the beginning of the story. But the story had an end, you remember, and some day it may be in my power to help you. Promise to send for me."

The girl laughed merrily. "The King of Spain's daughter," she quoted,

"Came to visit me,
And all for the love
Of my little nut-tree."

The other laughed also, as a young man in the uniform of the Preobrajenski Guard approached to claim the girl. "Even a nut-tree may be a shelter in a storm," he said.

"Of course I promise, Quentin," she said. "*Au revoir*. Soon I will come and take you to supper, and we will talk of nothing but nut-trees."

He watched the two leave the room, her gown glowing like a tongue of fire in the shadowy archway. Then he slowly rose to his feet, for he thought that for a little he would watch the dancing. Something moved beside him, and he turned in time to prevent the jade casket from crashing to the floor. Two of the supports had slipped.

He replaced the thing on its proper table and stood silent for a moment.

"The priest and the soldier gone, and only the beast of burden left. . . . If I were inclined to be superstitious, I should call that a dashed bad omen."

CHAPTER I

HOW A RETIRED PROVISION MERCHANT FELT THE IMPULSE OF SPRING

MR. DICKSON McCUNN completed the polishing of his smooth cheeks with the towel, glanced appreciatively at their reflection in the looking-glass, and then permitted his eyes to stray out of the window. In the little garden lilacs were budding, and there was a gold line of daffodils beside the tiny greenhouse. Beyond the sooty wall a birch flaunted its new tassels, and the jackdaws were circling about the steeple of the Guthrie Memorial Kirk. A blackbird whistled from a thorn-bush, and Mr. McCunn was inspired to follow its example. He began a tolerable version of "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch."

He felt singularly light-hearted, and the immediate cause was his safety razor. A week ago he had bought the thing in a sudden fit of enterprise, and now he shaved in five minutes, where before he had taken twenty, and no longer confronted his fellows, at least one day in three, with a countenance ludicrously mottled by sticking-plaster. Calculation revealed to him the fact that in his fifty-five years, having begun to shave at eighteen, he had wasted three thousand three hundred and seventy hours—or one hundred and forty days—or between four

and five months—by his neglect of this admirable invention. Now he felt that he had stolen a march on Time. He had fallen heir, thus late, to a fortune in unpurchasable leisure.

He began to dress himself in the sombre clothes in which he had been accustomed for thirty-five years and more to go down to the shop in Mearns Street. And then a thought came to him which made him discard the grey-striped trousers, sit down on the edge of his bed, and muse.

Since Saturday the shop was a thing of the past. On Saturday at half-past eleven, to the accompaniment of a glass of dubious sherry, he had completed the arrangements by which the provision shop in Mearns Street, which had borne so long the legend of D. McCunn, together with the branches in Crossmyloof and the Shaws, became the property of a company, yclept the United Supply Stores, Limited. He had received in payment cash, debentures and preference shares, and his lawyers and his own acumen had acclaimed the bargain. But all the week-end he had been a little sad. It was the end of so old a song, and he knew no other tune to sing. He was comfortably off, healthy, free from any particular cares in life, but free too from any particular duties. "Will I be going to turn into a useless old man?" he asked himself.

But he had woke up this Monday to the sound of the blackbird, and the world, which had seemed rather empty twelve hours before, was now brisk and alluring. His prowess in quick shaving assured him of his youth. "I'm no' that dead old," he

observed, as he sat on the edge of the bed, to his reflection in the big looking-glass.

It was not an old face. The sandy hair was a little thin on the top and a little grey at the temples, the figure was perhaps a little too full for youthful elegance, and an athlete would have censured the neck as too fleshy for perfect health. But the cheeks were rosy, the skin clear, and the pale eyes singularly childlike. They were a little weak, those eyes, and had some difficulty in looking for long at the same object, so that Mr. McCunn did not stare people in the face, and had, in consequence, at one time in his career acquired a perfectly undeserved reputation for cunning. He shaved clean, and looked uncommonly like a wise, plump schoolboy. As he gazed at his simulacrum he stopped whistling "Roy's Wife" and let his countenance harden into a noble sternness. Then he laughed, and observed in the language of his youth that "There was life in the auld dowg yet." In that moment the soul of Mr. McCunn conceived the Great Plan.

The first sign of it was that he swept all his business garments unceremoniously on to the floor. The next that he rootled at the bottom of a deep drawer and extracted a most disreputable tweed suit. It had once been what I believe is called a Lovat mixture, but was now a nondescript sub-fusc, with bright patches of colour like moss on whinstone. He regarded it lovingly; for it had been for twenty years his holiday wear, emerging annually for a hallowed month to be stained with salt and bleached with sun. He put it on, and stood shrouded in an

odour of camphor. A pair of thick nailed boots and a flannel shirt and collar completed the equipment of the sportsman. He had another long look at himself in the glass, and then descended whistling to breakfast. This time the tune was "Macgregor's Gathering," and the sound of it stirred the grimy lips of a man outside who was delivering coals—himself a Macgregor—to follow suit. Mr. McCunn was a very fountain of music that morning.

Tibby, the aged maid, had his newspaper and letters waiting by his plate, and a dish of ham and eggs frizzling near the fire. He fell to ravenously but still musingly, and he had reached the stage of scones and jam before he glanced at his correspondence. There was a letter from his wife now holidaying at the Neuk Hydropathic. She reported that her health was improving, and that she had met various people who had known somebody who had known somebody else whom she had once known herself. Mr. McCunn read the dutiful pages and smiled. "Mamma's enjoying herself fine," he observed to the teapot. He knew that for his wife the earthly paradise was a hydropathic, where she put on her afternoon dress and every jewel she possessed when she rose in the morning, ate large meals of which the novelty atoned for the nastiness, and collected an immense casual acquaintance with whom she discussed ailments, ministers, sudden deaths, and the intricate genealogies of her class. For his part he rancorously hated hydropathics, having once spent a black week under the roof of one in his wife's company. He detested the

food, the Turkish baths (he had a passionate aversion to baring his body before strangers), the inability to find anything to do and the compulsion to endless small talk. A thought flitted over his mind which he was too loyal to formulate. Once he and his wife had had similar likings, but they had taken different roads since their child died. Janet! He saw again—he was never quite free from the sight—the solemn little white-frocked girl who had died long ago in the spring.

It may have been the thought of the Neuk Hydro-pathic, or more likely the thin clean scent of the daffodils with which Tibby had decked the table, but long ere breakfast was finished the Great Plan had ceased to be an airy vision and become a sober well-masoned structure. Mr. McCunn—I may confess it at the start—was an incurable romantic.

He had had a humdrum life since the day when he had first entered his uncle's shop with the hope of some day succeeding that honest grocer; and his feet had never strayed a yard from his sober rut. But his mind, like the Dying Gladiator's, had been far away. As a boy he had voyaged among books, and they had given him a world where he could shape his career according to his whimsical fancy. Not that Mr. McCunn was what is known as a great reader. He read slowly and fastidiously, and sought in literature for one thing alone. Sir Walter Scott had been his first guide, but he read the novels not for their insight into human character or for their historical pageantry, but because they gave him material wherewith to construct fantastic jour-

neys. It was the same with Dickens. A lit tavern, a stage-coach, post-horses, the clack of hoofs on a frosty road, went to his head like wine. He was a Jacobite not because he had any views on Divine Right, but because he had always before his eyes a picture of a knot of adventurers in cloaks, new landed from France, among the western heather.

On this select basis he had built up his small library—Defoe, Hakluyt, Hazlitt and the essayists, Boswell, some indifferent romances and a shelf of spirited poetry. His tastes became known, and he acquired a reputation for a scholarly habit. He was president of the Literary Society of the Guthrie Memorial Kirk, and read to its members a variety of papers full of a gusto which rarely became critical. He had been three times chairman at Burns Anniversary dinners, and had delivered orations in eulogy of the national Bard; not because he greatly admired him—he thought him rather vulgar—but because he took Burns as an emblem of the un-Burns-like literature which he loved. Mr. McCunn was no scholar and was sublimely unconscious of background. He grew his flowers in his small garden-plot oblivious of their origin so long as they gave him the colour and scent he sought. Scent, I say, for he appreciated more than the mere picturesque. He had a passion for words and cadences, and would be haunted for weeks by a cunning phrase, savouring it as a connoisseur savours a vintage. Wherefore long ago, when he could ill afford it, he had purchased the *Edinburgh Stevenson*. They were the only large books on his shelves, for

he had a liking for small volumes—things he could stuff into his pocket in that sudden journey which he loved to contemplate.

Only he had never taken it. The shop had tied him up for eleven months in the year, and the twelfth had always found him settled decorously with his wife in some seaside villa. He had not fretted, for he was content with dreams. He was always a little tired, too, when the holidays came, and his wife told him he was growing old. He consoled himself with tags from the more philosophic of his authors, but he scarcely needed consolation. For he had large stores of modest contentment.

But now something had happened. A spring morning and a safety razor had convinced him that he was still young. Since yesterday he was a man of a large leisure. Providence had done for him what he would never have done for himself. The rut in which he had travelled so long had given place to open country. He repeated to himself one of the quotations with which he had been wont to stir the literary young men at the Guthrie Memorial Kirk:

“What’s a man’s age? He must hurry more, that’s all;
Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold:
When we mind labour, then only, we’re too old—
What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul?”

He would go journeying—who but he?—pleasantly.

It sounds a trivial resolve, but it quickened Mr. McCunn to the depths of his being. A holiday, and alone! On foot, of course, for he must travel light. He would buckle on a pack after the approved fashion. He had the very thing in a drawer upstairs, which he had bought some years ago at a sale. That and a waterproof and a stick, and his outfit was complete. A book, too, and, as he lit his first pipe, he considered what it should be. Poetry, clearly, for it was the Spring, and besides poetry could be got in pleasantly small bulk. He stood before his bookshelves trying to select a volume, rejecting one after another as inapposite. Browning—Keats, Shelley—they seemed more suited for the hearth than for the roadside. He did not want anything Scots, for he was of opinion that Spring came more richly in England and that English people had a better notion of it. He was tempted by the Oxford Anthology, but was deterred by its thickness, for he did not possess the thin-paper edition. Finally he selected Izaak Walton. He had never fished in his life, but *The Compleat Angler* seemed to fit his mood. It was old and curious and learned and fragrant with the youth of things. He remembered its falling cadences, its country songs and wise meditations. Decidedly it was the right scrip for his pilgrimage.

Characteristically he thought last of where he was to go. Every bit of the world beyond his front door had its charms to the seeing eye. There seemed nothing common or unclean that fresh morning. Even a walk among coal-pits had its attractions.

. . . But since he had the right to choose, he lingered over it like an epicure. Not the Highlands, for Spring came late among their sour mosses. Some place where there were fields and woods and inns, somewhere, too, within call of the sea. It must not be too remote, for he had no time to waste on train journeys; nor too near, for he wanted a countryside untainted. Presently he thought of Carrick. A good green land, as he remembered it, with purposeful white roads and public-houses sacred to the memory of Burns; near the hills but yet lowland, and with a bright sea chafing on its shores. He decided on Carrick, found a map and planned his journey.

Then he routed out his knapsack, packed it with a modest change of raiment, and sent out Tibby to buy chocolate and tobacco and to cash a cheque at the Strathclyde Bank. Till Tibby returned he occupied himself with delicious dreams. . . . He saw himself daily growing browner and leaner, swinging along broad highways or wandering in bypaths. He pictured his seasons of ease, when he unslung his pack and smoked in some clump of lilacs by a burnside—he remembered a phrase of Stevenson's somewhat like that. He would meet and talk with all sorts of folk; an exhilarating prospect, for Mr. McCunn loved his kind. There would be the evening hour before he reached his inn, when, pleasantly tired, he would top some ridge and see the welcoming lights of a little town. There would be the lamp-lit after-supper time when he would read and reflect, and the start in the gay morning, when

tobacco tastes sweetest and even fifty-five seems young. It would be holiday of the purest, for no business now tugged at his coat-tails. He was beginning a new life, he told himself, when he could cultivate the seedling interests which had withered beneath the far-reaching shade of the shop. Was ever a man more fortunate or more free?

Tibby was told that he was going off for a week or two. No letters need be forwarded, for he would be constantly moving, but Mrs. McCunn at the Neuk Hydropathic would be kept informed of his whereabouts. Presently he stood on his doorstep, a stocky figure in ancient tweeds, with a bulging pack slung on his arm, and a stout hazel stick in his hand. A passer-by would have remarked an elderly shopkeeper bent apparently on a day in the country, a common little man on a prosaic errand. But the passer-by would have been wrong, for he could not see into the heart. The plump citizen was the eternal pilgrim; he was Jason, Ulysses, Eric the Red, Albuquerque, Cortez—starting out to discover new worlds.

Before he left Mr. McCunn had given Tibby a letter to post. That morning he had received an epistle from a benevolent acquaintance, one Mackintosh, regarding a group of urchins who called themselves the "Gorbals Die-Hards." Behind the premises in Mearns Street lay a tract of slums, full of mischievous boys with whom his staff waged truceless war. But lately there had started among them a kind of unauthorised and unofficial Boy Scouts, who, without uniform or badge or any kind

of paraphernalia, followed the banner of Sir Robert Baden-Powell and subjected themselves to a rude discipline. They were far too poor to join an orthodox troop, but they faithfully copied what they believed to be the practices of more fortunate boys. Mr. McCunn had witnessed their pathetic parades, and had even passed the time of day with their leader, a red-haired savage called Dougal. The philanthropic Mackintosh had taken an interest in the gang and now desired subscriptions to send them to camp in the country.

Mr. McCunn, in his new exhilaration, felt that he could not deny to others what he proposed for himself. His last act before leaving was to send Mackintosh ten pounds.

CHAPTER II

OF MR. JOHN HERITAGE AND THE DIFFERENCE IN POINTS OF VIEW

DICKSON McCUNN was never to forget the first stage in that pilgrimage. A little after midday he descended from a grimy third-class carriage at a little station whose name I have forgotten. In the village near-by he purchased some new-baked buns and ginger biscuits, to which he was partial, and followed by the shouts of urchins, who admired his pack—"Look at the auld man gaun to the schule"—he emerged into open country. The late April noon gleamed like a frosty morning, but the air, though tonic, was kind. The road ran over sweeps of moorland where curlews wailed, and into lowland pastures dotted with very white, very vocal lambs. The young grass had the warm fragrance of new milk. As he went he munched his buns, for he had resolved to have no plethoric midday meal, and presently he found the burnside nook of his fancy, and halted to smoke. On a patch of turf close to a grey stone bridge he had out his Walton and read the chapter on "The Chavender or Chub." The collocation of words delighted him and inspired him to verse. "Lavender or Lub"—"Pavender or Pub"—"Gravender or Grub"—but the monosyllables proved too vulgar for poetry. Regretfully he desisted.

The rest of the road was as idyllic as the start. He would tramp steadily for a mile or so and then saunter, leaning over bridges to watch the trout in the pools, admiring from a dry-stone dyke the unsteady gambols of new-born lambs, kicking up dust from strips of moor-burn on the heather. Once by a fir-wood he was privileged to surprise three lunatic hares waltzing. His cheeks glowed with the sun; he moved in an atmosphere of pastoral, serene and contented. When the shadows began to lengthen he arrived at the village of Cloncae, where he proposed to lie. The inn looked dirty, but he found a decent widow, above whose door ran the legend in home-made lettering, "Mrs. brockie tea and Coffee," and who was willing to give him quarters. There he supped handsomely off ham and eggs, and dipped into a work called *Covenanting Worthies*, which garnished a table decorated with sea-shells. At half-past nine precisely he retired to bed and unhesitating sleep.

Next morning he awoke to a changed world. The sky was grey and so low that his outlook was bounded by a cabbage garden, while a surly wind prophesied rain. It was chilly, too, and he had his breakfast beside the kitchen fire. Mrs. Brockie could not spare a capital letter for her surname on the signboard, but she exalted it in her talk. He heard of a multitude of Brockies, ascendant, descendant and collateral, who seemed to be in a fair way to inherit the earth. Dickson listened sympathetically, and lingered by the fire. He felt stiff from yesterday's exercise, and the edge was off his spirit.

The start was not quite what he had pictured. His pack seemed heavier, his boots tighter, and his pipe drew badly. The first miles were all uphill, with a wind tingling his ears, and no colours in the landscape but brown and grey. Suddenly he awoke to the fact that he was dismal, and thrust the notion behind him. He expanded his chest and drew in long draughts of air. He told himself that this sharp weather was better than sunshine. He remembered that all travellers in romances battled with mist and rain. Presently his body recovered comfort and vigour, and his mind worked itself into cheerfulness.

He overtook a party of tramps and fell into talk with them. He had always had a fancy for the class, though he had never known anything nearer it than city beggars. He pictured them as philosophic vagabonds, full of quaint turns of speech, unconscious Borrovians. With these samples his disillusionment was speedy. The party was made up of a ferret-faced man with a red nose, a draggle-tailed woman, and a child in a crazy perambulator. Their conversation was one-sided, for it immediately resolved itself into a whining chronicle of misfortunes and petitions for relief. It cost him half a crown to be rid of them.

The road was alive with tramps that day. The next one did the accosting. Hailing Mr. McCunn as "Guv'nor," he asked to be told the way to Manchester. The objective seemed so enterprising that Dickson was impelled to ask questions, and heard, in what appeared to be in the accents of the

Colonies, the tale of a career of unvarying calamity. There was nothing merry or philosophic about this adventurer. Nay, there was something menacing. He eyed his companion's waterproof covetously, and declared that he had had one like it which had been stolen from him the day before. Had the place been lonely he might have contemplated highway robbery, but they were at the entrance to a village, and the sight of a public-house awoke his thirst. Dickson parted with him at the cost of sixpence for a drink.

He had no more company that morning except an aged stone-breaker whom he convoyed for half a mile. The stone-breaker also was soured with the world. He walked with a limp, which, he said, was due to an accident years before, when he had been run into by "ane o' thae damned velocipeeds." The word revived in Dickson memories of his youth, and he was prepared to be friendly. But the ancient would have none of it. He inquired morosely what he was after, and, on being told, remarked that he might have learned more sense. "It's a daft-like thing for an auld man like you to be traivellin' the roads. Ye maun be ill-off for a job." Questioned as to himself he became, as the newspapers say, "reticent," and having reached his bing of stones, turned rudely to his duties. "Awa' hame wi' ye," were his parting words. "It's idle scoondrels like you that maks wark for honest folk like me."

The morning was not a success, but the strong air had given Dickson such an appetite that he re-

solved to break his rule, and, on reaching the little town of Kilchrist, he sought luncheon at the chief hotel. There he found that which revived his spirits. A solitary bagman shared the meal, who revealed the fact that he was in the grocery line. There followed a well-informed and most technical conversation. He was drawn to speak of the United Supply Stores, Limited, of their prospects and of their predecessor, Mr. McCunn, whom he knew well by repute but had never met. "Yon's the clever one," he observed. "I've always said there's no longer head in the city of Glasgow than McCunn. An old-fashioned firm, but it has aye managed to keep up with the times. He's just retired, they tell me, and in my opinion it's a big loss to the provision trade. . . ." Dickson's heart glowed within him. Here was Romance; to be praised incognito; to enter a casual inn and find that fame had preceded him. He warmed to the bagman, insisted on giving him a liqueur and a cigar, and finally revealed himself. "I'm Dickson McCunn," he said, "taking a bit holiday. If there's anything I can do for you when I get back, just let me know." With mutual esteem they parted.

He had need of all his good spirits, for he emerged into an unrelenting drizzle. The environs of Kilchrist are at the best unlovely, and in the wet they were as melancholy as a graveyard. But the encounter with the bagman had worked wonders with Dickson, and he strode lustily into the weather, his waterproof collar buttoned round his chin. The road climbed to a bare moor, where lagoons had

formed in the ruts, and the mist showed on each side only a yard or two of soaking heather. Soon he was wet; presently every part of him, boots, body and pack, was one vast sponge. The water-proof was not water-proof, and the rain penetrated to his most intimate garments. Little he cared. He felt lighter, younger, than on the idyllic previous day. He enjoyed the buffets of the storm, and one wet mile succeeded another to the accompaniment of Dickson's shouts and laughter. There was no one abroad that afternoon, so he could talk aloud to himself and repeat his favourite poems. About five in the evening there presented himself at the Black Bull Inn at Kirkmichael a soaked, disreputable, but most cheerful traveller.

Now the Black Bull at Kirkmichael is one of the few very good inns left in the world. It is an old place and an hospitable, for it has been for generations a haunt of anglers, who above all other men understand comfort. There are always bright fires there, and hot water, and old soft leather arm-chairs, and an aroma of good food and good tobacco, and giant trout in glass cases, and pictures of Captain Barclay of Urie walking to London, and Mr. Ramsay of Barnton winning a horse-race, and the three-volume edition of the Waverley Novels with many volumes missing, and indeed all those things which an inn should have. Also there used to be—there may still be—sound vintage claret in the cellars. The Black Bull expects its guests to arrive in every stage of dishevelment, and Dickson was received by a cordial landlord, who offered dry

garments as a matter of course. The pack proved to have resisted the elements, and a suit of clothes and slippers were provided by the house. Dickson, after a glass of toddy, wallowed in a hot bath, which washed all the stiffness out of him. He had a fire in his bedroom, beside which he wrote the opening passages of that diary he had vowed to keep, descanting lyrically upon the joys of ill weather. At seven o'clock, warm and satisfied in soul, and with his body clad in raiment several sizes too large for it, he descended to dinner.

At one end of the long table in the dining-room sat a group of anglers. They looked jovial fellows, and Dickson would fain have joined them; but, having been fishing all day in the Loch o' the Threshes, they were talking their own talk, and he feared that his admiration for Izaak Walton did not qualify him to butt into the erudite discussions of fishermen. The landlord seemed to think likewise, for he drew back a chair for him at the other end, where sat a young man absorbed in a book. Dickson gave him good evening and got an abstracted reply. The young man supped the Black Bull's excellent broth with one hand, and with the other turned the pages of his volume. A glance convinced Dickson that the work was French, a literature which did not interest him. He knew little of the tongue and suspected it of impropriety.

Another guest entered and took the chair opposite the bookish young man. He was also young—not more than thirty-three—and to Dickson's eye, was the kind of person he would have liked to re-

semble. He was tall and free from any superfluous flesh; his face was lean, fine-drawn and deeply sunburnt so that the hair above showed oddly pale; the hands were brown and beautifully shaped, but the forearm revealed by the loose cuffs of his shirt was as brawny as a blacksmith's. He had rather pale blue eyes, which seemed to have looked much at the sun, and a small moustache the colour of ripe hay. His voice was low and pleasant, and he pronounced his words precisely, like a foreigner.

He was very ready to talk, but in defiance of Dr. Johnson's warning, his talk was all questions. He wanted to know everything about the neighbourhood—who lived in what houses, what were the distances between the towns, what harbours would admit what class of vessel. Smiling agreeably, he put Dickson through a catechism to which he knew none of the answers. The landlord was called in, and proved more helpful. But on one matter he was fairly at a loss. The catechist asked about a house called Darkwater, and was met with a shake of the head. "I know no sic-like name in this countryside, sir," and the catechist looked disappointed.

The literary young man said nothing, but ate trout abstractedly, one eye on his book. The fish had been caught by the anglers in the Loch o' the Threshes, and phrases describing their capture floated from the other end of the table. The young man had a second helping, and then refused the excellent hill mutton that followed, contenting himself with cheese. Not so Dickson and the catechist. They ate everything that was set before them, top-

ping up with a glass of port. Then the latter, who had been talking illuminatingly about Spain, rose, bowed and left the table, leaving Dickson, who liked to linger over his meals, to the society of the ichthyophagous student.

He nodded towards the book. "Interesting?" he asked.

The young man shook his head and displayed the name on the cover. "Anatole France. I used to be crazy about him, but now he seems rather a back number." Then he glanced towards the just-vacated chair. "Australian," he said.

"How d'you know?"

"Can't mistake them. There's nothing else so lean and fine produced on the globe to-day. I was next door to them at Pozières and saw them fight. Lord! Such men! Now and then you had a freak, but most looked like Phæbus Apollo."

Dickson gazed with a new respect at his neighbour, for he had not associated him with battle-fields. During the war he had been a fervent patriot, but, though he had never heard a shot himself, so many of his friends' sons and nephews, not to mention cousins of his own, had seen service, that he had come to regard the experience as commonplace. Lions in Africa and bandits in Mexico seemed to him novel and romantic things, but not trenches and airplanes which were the whole world's property. But he could scarcely fit his neighbour into even his haziest picture of war. The young man was tall and a little round-shouldered; he had short-sighted, rather prominent brown eyes, untidy

black hair and dark eyebrows which came near to meeting. He wore a knickerbocker suit of bluish-grey tweed, a pale blue shirt, a pale blue collar and a dark blue tie—a symphony of colour which seemed too elaborately considered to be quite natural. Dickson had set him down as an artist or a newspaper correspondent, objects to him of lively interest. But now the classification must be reconsidered.

“So you were in the war,” he said encouragingly.

“Four blasted years,” was the savage reply.

“And I never want to hear the name of the beastly thing again.”

“You said he was an Australian,” said Dickson, casting back. “But I thought Australians had a queer accent, like the English.”

“They’ve all kind of accents, but you can never mistake their voice. It’s got the sun in it. Canadians have got grinding ice in theirs, and Virginians have got butter. So have the Irish. In Britain there are no voices, only speaking tubes. It isn’t safe to judge men by their accent only. You yourself I take to be Scotch, but for all I know you may be a senator from Chicago or a Boer General.”

“I’m from Glasgow. My name’s Dickson McCunn.” He had a faint hope that the announcement might affect the other as it had affected the bagman at Kilchrist.

“Golly, what a name!” exclaimed the young man rudely.

Dickson was nettled. “It’s very old Highland,” he said. “It means the son of a dog.”

"Which—Christian name or surname?" Then the young man appeared to think he had gone too far, for he smiled pleasantly. "And a very good name too. Mine is prosaic by comparison. They call me John Heritage."

"That," said Dickson, mollified, "is like a name out of a book. With that name by rights you should be a poet."

Gloom settled on the young man's countenance. "It's a dashed sight too poetic. It's like Edwin Arnold and Alfred Austin and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Great poets have vulgar monosyllables for names, like Keats. The new Shakespeare when he comes along will probably be called Grubb or Jubber, if he isn't Jones. With a name like yours I might have a chance. *You* should be the poet."

"I'm very fond of reading," said Dickson modestly.

A slow smile crumpled Mr. Heritage's face. "There's a fire in the smoking-room," he observed as he rose. "We'd better bag the armchairs before these fishing louts take them." Dickson followed obediently. This was the kind of chance acquaintance for whom he had hoped, and he was prepared to make the most of him.

The fire burned bright in the little dusky smoking-room, lighted by one oil-lamp. Mr. Heritage flung himself into a chair, stretched his long legs and lit a pipe.

"You like reading?" he asked. "What sort? Any use for poetry?"

"Plenty," said Dickson. "I've aye been fond of learning it up and repeating it to myself when I had nothing to do. In church and waiting on trains, like. It used to be Tennyson, but now it's more Browning. I can say a lot of Browning."

The other screwed his face into an expression of disgust. "I know the stuff. 'Damask cheeks and dewy sister eyelids.' Or else the Eracles vein—'God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world.' No good, Mr. McCunn. All back numbers. Poetry's not a thing of pretty round phrases or noisy invocations. It's life itself, with the tang of the raw world in it—not a sweetmeat for middle-class women in parlours."

"Are you a poet, Mr. Heritage?"

"No, Dogson, I'm a paper-maker."

This was a new view to Mr. McCunn. "I just once knew a paper-maker," he observed reflectively. "They called him Tosh. He drank a bit."

"Well, I don't drink," said the other. "I'm a paper-maker, but that's for my bread and butter. Some day for my own sake I may be a poet."

"Have you published anything?"

The eager admiration in Dickson's tone gratified Mr. Heritage. He drew from his pocket a slim book. "My firstfruits," he said, rather shyly.

Dickson received it with reverence. It was a small volume in grey paper boards with a white label on the back, and it was lettered: "*Whorls—John Heritage's Book.*" He turned the pages and read a little. "It's a nice wee book," he observed at length.

"Good God, if you call it nice, I must have failed pretty badly," was the irritated answer.

Dickson read more deeply and was puzzled. It seemed worse than the worst of Browning to understand. He found one poem about a garden entitled "Revue." "Crimson and resonant clangs the dawn," said the poet. Then he went on to describe noonday:

"Sunflowers, tall Grenadiers, ogle the roses' short-skirted ballet.

The fumes of dark sweet wine hidden in frail petals
Madden the drunkard bees."

This seemed to him an odd way to look at things, and he boggled over a phrase about an "epicene lily." Then came evening: "The painted gauze of the stars flutters in a fold of twilight crape," sang Mr. Heritage; and again, "The moon's pale leprosy sloughs the fields."

Dickson turned to other verses which apparently enshrined the writer's memory of the trenches. They were largely compounded of oaths, and rather horrible, lingering lovingly over sights and smells which every one is aware of, but most people contrive to forget. He did not like them. Finally he skimmed a poem about a lady who turned into a bird. The evolution was described with intimate anatomical details which scared the honest reader.

He kept his eyes on the book for he did not know what to say. The trick seemed to be to describe

nature in metaphors mostly drawn from music-halls and haberdashers' shops, and, when at a loss, to fall to cursing. He thought it frankly very bad, and he laboured to find words which would combine politeness and honesty.

"Well?" said the poet.

"There's a lot of fine things here, but—but the lines don't just seem to scan very well."

Mr. Heritage laughed. "Now I can place you exactly. You like the meek rhyme and the conventional epithet. Well, I don't. The world has passed beyond that prettiness. You want the moon described as a Huntress or a gold disc or a flower—I say it's oftener like a beer barrel or a cheese. You want a wealth of jolly words and real things ruled out as unfit for poetry. I say there's nothing unfit for poetry. Nothing, Dogson! Poetry's everywhere, and the real thing is commoner among drabs and pot-houses and rubbish heaps than in your Sunday parlours. The poet's business is to distil it out of rottenness, and show that it is all one spirit, the thing that keeps the stars in their place. . . . I wanted to call my book '*Drains*,' for drains are sheer poetry, carrying off the excess and discards of human life to make the fields green and the corn ripen. But the publishers kicked. So I called it '*Whorls*,' to express my view of the exquisite involution of all things. Poetry is the fourth dimension of the soul. . . . Well, let's hear about your taste in prose."

Mr. McCunn was much bewildered, and a little inclined to be cross. He disliked being called

Dogson, which seemed to him an abuse of his etymological confidences. But his habit of politeness held.

He explained rather haltingly his preferences in prose.

Mr. Heritage listened with wrinkled brows.

"You're even deeper in the mud than I thought," he remarked. "You live in a world of painted laths and shadows. All this passion for the picturesque! Trash, my dear man, like a schoolgirl's novelette heroes. You make up romances about gipsies and sailors and the blackguards they call pioneers, but you know nothing about them. If you did, you would find they had none of the gilt and gloss you imagine. But the great things they have got in common with all humanity you ignore. It's like—it's like sentimentalising about a pancake because it looked like a buttercup, and all the while not knowing that it was good to eat."

At that moment the Australian entered the room to get a light for his pipe. He wore a motorcyclist's overalls and appeared to be about to take the road. He bade them good night and it seemed to Dickson that his face, seen in the glow of the fire, was drawn and anxious, unlike that of the agreeable companion at dinner.

"There," said Mr. Heritage, nodding after the departing figure. "I dare say you have been telling yourself stories about that chap—life in the bush, stock-riding and the rest of it. But probably he's a bank-clerk from Melbourne. . . . Your romanticism is one vast self-delusion and it blinds your eye

to the real thing. We have got to clear it out and with it all the damnable humbug of the Kelt."

Mr. McCunn, who spelt the word with a soft "C," was puzzled. "I thought a kelt was a kind of a no-weel fish," he interposed.

But the other, in the flood-tide of his argument, ignored the interruption. "That's the value of the war," he went on. "It has burst up all the old conventions, and we've got to finish the destruction before we can build. It is the same with literature and religion and society and politics. At them with the axe, say I. I have no use for priests and pedants. I've no use for upper classes and middle classes. There's only one class that matters, the plain man, the workers, who live close to life."

"The place for you," said Dickson dryly, "is in Russia among the Bolsheviks."

Mr. Heritage approved. "They are doing a great work in their own fashion. We needn't imitate all their methods—they're a trifle crude and have too many Jews among them—but they've got hold of the right end of the stick. They seek truth and reality."

Mr. McCunn was slowly being roused.

"What brings you wandering hereaways?" he asked.

"Exercise," was the answer. "I've been kept pretty closely tied up all winter. And I want leisure and quiet to think over things."

"Well, there's one subject you might turn your attention to. You'll have been educated like a gentleman?"

"Nine wasted years—five at Harrow, four at Cambridge."

"See here, then. You're daft about the working-class and have no use for any other. But what in the name of goodness do you know about working-men? . . . I come out of them myself, and have lived next door to them all my days. Take them one way and another, they're a decent sort, good and bad like the rest of us. But there's a wheen daft folk that would set them up as models—close to truth and reality, says you. It's sheer ignorance, for you're about as well acquaint with the working-man as with King Solomon. You say I make up fine stories about tinklers and sailor-men because I know nothing about them. That's maybe true. But you're at the same job yourself. You ideelise the working-man, you and your kind, because you're ignorant. You say that he's seeking for truth, when he's only looking for a drink and a rise in wages. You tell me he's near reality, but I tell you that his notion of reality is often just a short working day and looking on at a footba'-match on Saturday. . . . And when you run down what you call the middle-classes that do three-quarters of the world's work and keep the machine going and the working man in a job, then I tell you you're talking havers. Havers!"

Mr. McCunn, having delivered his defence of the bourgeoisie, rose abruptly and went to bed. He felt jarred and irritated. His innocent little private domain had been badly trampled by this stray bull of a poet. But as he lay in bed, before blowing out

his candle, he had recourse to Walton, and found a passage on which, as on a pillow, he went peacefully to sleep:

“As I left this place, and entered into the next field, a second pleasure entertained me; 'twas a handsome milkmaid, that had not yet attained so much age and wisdom as to load her mind with any fears of many things that will never be, as too many men too often do; but she cast away all care, and sang like a nightingale; her voice was good, and the ditty fitted for it; it was the smooth song that was made by *Kit Marlow* now at least fifty years ago. And the milkmaid's mother sung an answer to it, which was made by *Sir Walter Raleigh* in his younger days. They were old-fashioned poetry, but choicely good; I think much better than the strong lines that are now in fashion in this critical age.”

CHAPTER III

HOW CHILDE ROLAND AND ANOTHER CAME TO THE DARK TOWER

DICKSON woke with a vague sense of irritation. As his recollections took form they produced a very unpleasant picture of Mr. John Heritage. The poet had loosened all his placid idols, so that they shook and rattled in the niches where they had been erstwhile so secure. Mr. McCunn had a mind of a singular candour, and was prepared most honestly at all times to revise his views. But by this iconoclast he had been only irritated and in no way convinced. "*Sich* poetry!" he muttered to himself as he shivered in his bath (a daily cold tub instead of his customary hot one on Saturday night being part of the discipline of his holiday). "And yon blethers about the working-man!" he ingeminated as he shaved. He breakfasted alone, having outstripped even the fishermen, and as he ate he arrived at conclusions. He had a great respect for youth, but a line must be drawn somewhere. "The man's a child," he decided, "and not like to grow up. The way he's besotted on everything daftlike, if it's only *new*. And he's no rightly young either—speaks like an auld dominie, whiles. And he's rather impident," he concluded, with memories of "Dogson." . . . He was very clear that he never wanted to see

him again; that was the reason of his early breakfast. Having clarified his mind by definitions, Dickson felt comforted. He paid his bill, took an affectionate farewell of the landlord, and at 7.30 precisely stepped out into the gleaming morning.

It was such a day as only a Scots April can show. The cobbled streets of Kirkmichael still shone with the night's rain, but the storm clouds had fled before a mild south wind, and the whole circumference of the sky was a delicate translucent blue. Homely breakfast smells came from the houses and delighted Mr. McCunn's nostrils; a squalling child was a pleasant reminder of an awakening world, the urban counterpart to the morning song of birds; even the sanitary cart seemed a picturesque vehicle. He bought his ration of buns and ginger biscuits at a baker's shop whence various ragamuffin boys were preparing to distribute the householders' bread, and took his way up the Gallows Hill to the Burgh Muir almost with regret at leaving so pleasant a habitation.

A chronicle of ripe vintages must pass lightly over small beer. I will not dwell on his leisurely progress in the bright weather, or on his luncheon in a coppice of young firs, or on his thoughts which had returned to the idyllic. I take up the narrative at about three o'clock in the afternoon, when he is revealed seated on a milestone examining his map. For he had come, all unwitting, to a turning of the ways, and his choice is the cause of this veracious history.

The place was high up on a bare moor, which

showed a white lodge among pines, a white cottage in a green nook by a burnside, and no other marks of human dwelling. To his left, which was the east, the heather rose to a low ridge of hill, much scarred with peat-bogs, behind which appeared the blue shoulder of a considerable mountain. Before him the road was lost momentarily in the woods of a shooting-box, but reappeared at a great distance climbing a swell of upland which seemed to be the glacis of a jumble of bold summits. There was a pass there, the map told him, which led into Galloway. It was the road he had meant to follow, but as he sat on the milestone his purpose wavered. For there seemed greater attractions in the country which lay to the westward. Mr. McCunn, be it remembered, was not in search of brown heath and shaggy wood; he wanted greenery and the Spring.

Westward there ran out a peninsula in the shape of an isosceles triangle, of which his present high-road was the base. At a distance of a mile or so a railway ran parallel to the road, and he could see the smoke of a goods train waiting at a tiny station islanded in acres of bog. Thence the moor swept down to meadows and scattered copses, above which hung a thin haze of smoke which betokened a village. Beyond it were further woodlands, not firs but old shady trees, and as they narrowed to a point the gleam of two tiny estuaries appeared on either side. He could not see the final cape, but he saw the sea beyond it, flawed with catspaws, gold in the afternoon sun, and on it a small herring smack flapping listless sails.

Something in the view caught and held his fancy. He conned his map, and made out the names. The peninsula was called the Cruives—an old name apparently, for it was in antique lettering. He vaguely remembered that "cruives" had something to do with fishing, doubtless in the two streams which flanked it. One he had already crossed, the Laver, a clear tumbling water springing from green hills; the other, the Garple, descended from the rougher mountains to the south. The hidden village bore the name of Dalquharter, and the uncouth syllables awoke some vague recollection in his mind. The great house in the trees beyond—it must be a great house, for the map showed large policies—was Huntingtower.

The last name fascinated and almost decided him. He pictured an ancient keep by the sea, defended by converging rivers, which some old Comyn lord of Galloway had built to command the shore road and from which he had sallied to hunt in his wild hills. . . . He liked the way the moor dropped down to green meadows, and the mystery of the dark woods beyond. He wanted to explore the twin waters, and see how they entered that strange shimmering sea. The odd names, the odd cul-de-sac of a peninsula, powerfully attracted him. Why should he not spend a night there, for the map showed clearly that Dalquharter had an inn? He must decide promptly, for before him a side-road left the highway, and the signpost bore the legend, "Dalquharter and Huntingtower."

Mr. McCunn, being a cautious and pious man,

took the omens. He tossed a penny—heads go on, tails turn aside. It fell tails.

He knew as soon as he had taken three steps down the side-road that he was doing something momentous, and the exhilaration of enterprise stole into his soul. It occurred to him that this was the kind of landscape that he had always especially hankered after, and had made pictures of when he had a longing for the country on him—a wooded cape between streams, with meadows inland and then a long lift of heather. He had the same feeling of expectancy, of something most interesting and curious on the eve of happening, that he had had long ago when he waited on the curtain rising at his first play. His spirits soared like the lark, and he took to singing. If only the inn at Dalquharter were snug and empty, this was going to be a day in ten thousand. Thus mirthfully he swung down the rough grass-grown road, past the railway, till he came to a point where heath began to merge in pasture, and dry-stone walls split the moor into fields. Suddenly his pace slackened and song died on his lips. For, approaching from the right by a tributary path, was the Poet.

Mr. Heritage saw him afar off and waved a friendly hand. In spite of his chagrin Dickson could not but confess that he had misjudged his critic. Striding with long steps over the heather, his jacket open to the wind, his face a-glow and his capless head like a whin-bush for disorder, he cut a more wholesome and picturesque figure than in

the smoking-room the night before. He seemed to be in a companionable mood, for he brandished his stick and shouted greetings.

"Well met!" he cried; "I was hoping to fall in with you again. You must have thought me a pretty fair cub last night."

"I did that," was the dry answer.

"Well, I want to apologise. God knows what made me treat you to a university-extension lecture. I may not agree with you, but every man's entitled to his own views, and it was dashed poor form for me to start jawing you."

Mr. McCunn had no gift of nursing anger, and was very susceptible to apologies.

"That's all right," he murmured. "Don't mention it. I'm wondering what brought you down here, for it's off the road."

"Caprice. Pure caprice. I liked the look of this butt-end of nowhere."

"Same here. I've aye thought there was something terrible nice about a wee cape with a village at the neck of it and a burn each side."

"Now that's interesting," said Mr. Heritage. "You're obsessed by a particular type of landscape. Ever read Freud?"

Dickson shook his head.

"Well, you've got an odd complex somewhere. I wonder where the key lies. Cape—woods—two rivers—moor behind. Ever been in love, Dogson?"

Mr. McCunn was startled. "Love" was a word

rarely mentioned in his circle except on death-beds. "I've been a married man for thirty years," he said hurriedly.

"That won't do. It should have been a hopeless affair—the last sight of the lady on a spur of coast with water on three sides—that kind of thing, you know. Or it might have happened to an ancestor. . . . But you don't look the kind of breed for hopeless attachments. More likely some scoundrelly old Dogson long ago found sanctuary in this sort of place. Do you dream about it?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, I do. The queer thing is that I've got the same prepossession as you. As soon as I spotted this Cruives place on the map this morning, I saw it was what I was after. When I came in sight of it I almost shouted. I don't very often dream, but when I do that's the place I frequent. Odd, isn't it?"

Mr. McCunn was deeply interested at this unexpected revelation of romance. "Maybe it's being in love," he daringly observed.

The Poet demurred. "No. I'm not a connoisseur of obvious sentiment. That explanation might fit your case, but not mine. I'm pretty certain there's something hideous at the back of *my* complex—some grim old business tucked away back in the ages. For though I'm attracted by the place, I'm frightened too!"

There seemed no room for fear in the delicate landscape now opening before them. In front in groves of birch and rowans smoked the first houses

of a tiny village. The road had become a green "loaning" on the ample margin of which cattle grazed. The moorland still showed itself in spits of heather, and some distance off, where a rivulet ran in a hollow, there were signs of a fire and figures near it. These last Mr. Heritage regarded with disapproval.

"Some infernal trippers!" he murmured. "Or Boy Scouts. They desecrate everything. Why can't the *tunicatus popellus* keep away from a paradise like this!" Dickson, a democrat who felt nothing incongruous in the presence of other holiday-makers, was meditating a sharp rejoinder, when Mr. Heritage's tone changed.

"Ye gods! What a village!" he cried, as they turned a corner. There were not more than a dozen whitewashed houses, all set in little gardens of wallflower and daffodil and early fruit blossom. A triangle of green filled the intervening space, and in it stood an ancient wooden pump. There was no schoolhouse or kirk; not even a post-office—only a red box in a cottage side. Beyond rose the high wall and the dark trees of the demesne, and to the right up a by-road which clung to the park edge stood a two-storeyed building which bore the legend "The Cruives Inn."

The Poet became lyrical. "At last!" he cried. "The village of my dreams! Not a sign of commerce! No church or school or beastly recreation hall! Nothing but these divine little cottages and an ancient pub! Dogson, I warn you, I'm going to have the devil of a tea." And he declaimed:

"Thou shalt hear a song

After a while which Gods may listen to;
But place the flask upon the board and wait
Until the stranger hath allayed his thirst,
For poets, grasshoppers and nightingales
Sing cheerily but when the throat is moist."

Dickson, too, longed with sensual gusto for tea. But, as they drew nearer, the inn lost its hospitable look. The cobbles of the yard were weedy, as if rarely visited by traffic, a pane in a window was broken, and the blinds hung tattered. The garden was a wilderness, and the doorstep had not been scoured for weeks. But the place had a landlord, for he had seen them approach and was waiting at the door to meet them.

He was a big man in his shirt sleeves, wearing old riding breeches unbuttoned at the knees, and thick ploughman's boots. He had no leggings, and his fleshy calves were imperfectly covered with woollen socks. His face was large and pale, his neck bulged, and he had a gross unshaven jowl. He was a type familiar to students of society; not the innkeeper, which is a thing consistent with good breeding and all the refinements; a type not unknown in the House of Lords, especially among recent creations, common enough in the House of Commons and the City of London, and by no means infrequent in the governing circles of Labour; the type known to the discerning as the Licensed Victualler.

His face was wrinkled in official smiles, and he gave the travellers a hearty good afternoon.

"Can we stop here for the night?" Dickson asked.

The landlord looked sharply at him, and then replied to Mr. Heritage. His expression passed from official bonhomie to official contrition.

"Impossible, gentlemen. Quite impossible. . . . Ye couldn't have come at a worse time. I've only been here a fortnight myself, and we haven't got right shaken down yet. Even then I might have made shift to do with ye, but the fact is we've illness in the house, and I'm fair at my wits' end. It breaks my heart to turn gentlemen away and me that keen to get the business started. But there it is!" He spat vigorously as if to emphasise the desperation of his quandary.

The man was clearly Scots, but his native speech was overlaid with something alien, something which might have been acquired in America or in going down to the sea in ships. He hitched his breeches, too, with a nautical air.

"Is there nowhere else we can put up?" Dickson asked.

"Not in this one-horse place. Just a wheen auld wives that packed thegither they haven't room for an extra hen. But it's grand weather, and it's not above seven miles to Auchenlochan. Say the word and I'll yoke the horse and drive ye there."

"Thank you. We prefer to walk," said Mr. Heritage. Dickson would have tarried to inquire after the illness in the house, but his companion hurried him off. Once he looked back, and saw the landlord still on the doorstep gazing after them.

"That fellow's a swine," said Mr. Heritage sourly. "I wouldn't trust my neck in his pothouse. Now, Dogson, I'm hanged if I'm going to leave this place. We'll find a corner in the village somehow. Besides, I'm determined on tea."

The little street slept in the clear pure light of an early April evening. Blue shadows lay on the white road, and a delicate aroma of cooking tantalised hungry nostrils. The near meadows shone like pale gold against the dark lift of the moor. A light wind had begun to blow from the west and carried the faintest tang of salt. The village at that hour was pure Paradise, and Dickson was of the Poet's opinion. At all costs they must spend the night there.

They selected a cottage whiter and neater than the others, which stood at a corner, where a narrow lane turned southward. Its thatched roof had been lately repaired, and starched curtains of a dazzling whiteness decorated the small, closely-shut windows. Likewise it had a green door and a polished brass knocker.

Tacitly the duty of envoy was entrusted to Mr. McCunn. Leaving the other at the gate, he advanced up the little path lined with quartz stones, and politely but firmly dropped the brass knocker. He must have been observed, for ere the noise had ceased the door opened, and an elderly woman stood before him. She had a sharply-cut face, the rudiments of a beard, big spectacles on her nose, and an old-fashioned lace cap on her smooth white hair. A little grim she looked at first sight, be-

cause of her thin lips and Roman nose, but her mild curious eyes corrected the impression and gave the envöy confidence.

"Good afternoon, mistress," he said, broadening his voice to something more rustical than his normal Glasgow speech. "Me and my friend are paying our first visit here, and we're terrible taken up with the place. We would like to bide the night, but the inn is no' taking folk. Is there any chance, think you, of a bed here?"

"I'll no tell ye a lee," said the woman. "There's twae guid beds in the loft. But I dinna tak' lodgers and I dinna want to be bothered wi' ye. I'm an auld wumman and no' as stoot as I was. Ye'd better try doun the street. Eppie Home nicht tak' ye."

Dickson wore his most ingratiating smile. "But, mistress, Eppie Home's house is no' yours. We've taken a tremendous fancy to this bit. Can you no' manage to put with us for the one night? We're quiet auld-fashioned folk and we'll no' trouble you much. Just our tea and maybe an egg to it, and a bowl of porridge in the morning."

The woman seemed to relent. "Whaur's your freend?" she asked, peering over her spectacles towards the garden gate. The waiting Mr. Heritage, seeing her eyes moving in his direction, took off his cap with a brave gesture and advanced. "Glorious weather, Madam," he declared.

"English," whispered Dickson to the woman, in explanation.

She examined the Poet's neat clothes and Mr.

McCunn's homely garments, and apparently found them reassuring. "Come in," she said shortly. "I see ye're wilfu' folk and I'll hae to dae my best for ye."

A quarter of an hour later the two travellers, having been introduced to two spotless beds in the loft, and having washed luxuriously at the pump in the back yard, were seated in Mrs. Morran's kitchen before a meal which fulfilled their wildest dreams. She had been baking that morning, so there were white scones and barley scones, and oaten farles, and russet pancakes. There were three boiled eggs for each of them; there was a segment of an immense currant cake ("a present from my guid brither last Hogmanay"); there was skim-milk cheese; there were several kinds of jam, and there was a pot of dark-gold heather honey. "Try hinny and aitcake," said their hostess. "My man used to say he never fund onything as guid in a' his days."

Presently they heard her story. Her name was Morran, and she had been a widow these ten years. Of her family her son was in South Africa, one daughter a lady's maid in London, and the other married to a schoolmaster in Kyle. The son had been in France fighting, and had come safely through. He had spent a month or two with her before his return, and, she feared, had found it dull. "There's no' a man body in the place. Naething but auld wives."

That was what the innkeeper had told them. Mr. McCunn inquired concerning the inn.

"There's new folk just come. What's this they ca' them?—Robson—Dobson—aye, Dobson. What for wad they no' tak' ye in? Does the man think he's a laird to refuse folk that gait?"

"He said he had illness in the house."

Mrs. Morran meditated. "Whae in the world can be lyin' there? The man bides his lane. He got a lassie frae Auchenlochan to cook, but she and her box gaed off in the post-cairt yestreen. I doot he tell't ye a lee, though it's no for me to juidge him. I've never spoken a word to ane o' thae new folk."

Dickson inquired about the "new folk."

"They're a' new come in the last three weeks, and there's no' a man o' the auld stock left. John Blackstocks at the West Lodge dee'd o' pneumony last back-end, and auld Simon Tappie at the Gairdens flitted to Maybole a year come Mairtinmas. There's naebody at the Gairdens noo, but there's a man come to the West Lodge, a blackavised body wi' a face like bend-leather. Tam Robison used to bide at the South Lodge, but Tam got killed about Mesopotamy, and his wife took the bairns to her guidshire up at the Garpleheid. I seen the man that's in the South Lodge gaun up the street when I was finishin' my denner—a shilpit body and a lameter, but he hirples as fast as ither folk run. He's no' bonny to look at. I canna think what the factor's ettlin' at to let sic' ill-faured chieles come about the toun."

Their hostess was rapidly rising in Dickson's esteem. She sat very straight in her chair, eating

with the careful gentility of a bird, and primming her thin lips after every mouthful of tea.

"Who bides in the Big House?" he asked. "Huntingtower is the name, isn't it?"

"When I was a lassie they ca'ed it Dalquharter Hoose, and Huntingtower was the auld rickle o' stanes at the sea-end. But naething wad serve the last laird's faither but he maun change the name, for he was clean daft about what they ca' antickities. Ye speir whae bides in the Hoose? Naebody, since the young laird dee'd. It's standin' cauld and lanely and steikit, and it aince the cheeriest dwallin' in a' Carrick."

Mrs. Morran's tone grew tragic. "It's a queer world wi'out the auld gentry. My faither and my guidshire and his faither afore him served the Kennedys, and my man Dauvit Morran was gemkeeper to them, and afore I mairried I was ane o' the table-maids. They were kind folk, the Kennedys, and, like a' the rale gentry, maist mindfu' o' them that served them. Sic' merry nichts I've seen in the auld Hoose, at Hallowe'en and Hogmanay, and at the servants' balls and the waddin's o' the young leddies! But the laird bode to waste his siller in stane and lime, and hadna that much to leave to his bairns. And now they've a' scattered or deid."

Her grave face wore the tenderness which comes from affectionate reminiscence.

"There was never sic a laddie as young Maister Quentin. No' a week gaed by but he was in here, cryin', 'Phemie Morran, I've come till my tea!' Fine he likit my treacle scones, puir man. There

wasna ane in the countryside sae bauld a rider at the hunt, or sic a skeely fisher. And he was clever at his books tae, a graund scholar, they said, and ettlin' at bein' what they ca' a dipplemat. But that's a' bye wi'."

"Quentin Kennedy—the fellow in the Tins?" Heritage asked. "I saw him in Rome when he was with the Mission."

"I dinna ken. He was a brave sodger, but he wasna long fechtin' in France till he got a bullet in his breist. Syne we heard tell o' him in far awa' bits like Russia; and syne cam' the end o' the war and we lookit to see him back, fishin' the waters and ridin' like Jehu as in the auld days. But wae's me! It wasna permitted. The next news we got, the puir laddie was deid o' influenzy and buried somewhere about France. The wanchancy bullet maun have weakened his chest, nae doot. So that's the end o' the guid stock o' Kennedy o' Huntingtower, whae hae been great folk sin' the time o' Robert Bruce. And noo the Hoose is shut up till the lawyers can get somebody sae far left to himsel' as to tak' it on lease, and in thae dear days it's no' just onybody that wants a muckle castle."

"Who are the lawyers?" Dickson asked.

"Glendonan and Speirs in Embro. But they never look near the place, and Maister Loudoun in Auchenlochan does the factorin'. He's let the public an' filled the twae lodges, and he'll be thinkin' nae doot that he's done eneuch."

Mrs. Morran had poured some hot water into

the big slop-bowl, and had begun the operation known as "synding out" the cups. It was a hint that the meal was over and Dickson and Heritage rose from the table. Followed by an injunction to be back for supper "on the chap o' nine," they strolled out into the evening. Two hours of some sort of daylight remained, and the travellers had that impulse to activity which comes to all men who, after a day of exercise and emptiness, are stayed with a satisfying tea.

"You should be happy, Dogson," said the Poet. "Here we have all the materials for your blessed romance—old mansion, extinct family, village deserted of men and an innkeeper whom I suspect of being a villain. I feel almost a convert to your nonsense myself. We'll have a look at the House."

They turned down the road which ran north by the park wall, past the inn which looked more abandoned than ever, till they came to an entrance which was clearly the West Lodge. It had once been a pretty, modish cottage, with a thatched roof and dormer windows, but now it was badly in need of repair. A window-pane was broken and stuffed with a sack, the posts of the porch were giving inwards, and the thatch was crumbling under the attentions of a colony of starlings. The great iron gates were rusty, and on the coat of arms above them the gilding was patchy and tarnished.

Apparently the gates were locked, and even the side wicket failed to open to Heritage's vigorous shaking. Inside a weedy drive disappeared among ragged rhododendrons.

The noise brought a man to the lodge door. He was a sturdy fellow in a suit of black clothes which had not been made for him. He might have been a butler *en deshabelle*, but for the presence of a pair of field boots into which he had tucked the ends of his trousers. The curious thing about him was his face, which was decorated with features so tiny as to give the impression of a monstrous child. Each in itself was well enough formed, but eyes, nose, mouth, chin were of a smallness curiously out of proportion to the head and body. Such an anomaly might have been redeemed by the expression; good-humour would have invested it with an air of agreeable farce. But there was no friendliness in the man's face. It was set like a judge's in a stony impassiveness.

"May we walk up to the House?" Heritage asked. "We are here for a night and should like to have a look at it."

The man advanced a step. He had either a bad cold, or a voice comparable in size to his features.

"There's no entrance here," he said huskily. "I have strict orders."

"Oh, come now," said Heritage. "It can do nobody any harm if you let us in for half an hour."

The man advanced another step.

"You shall not come in. Go away from here. Go away, I tell you. It is private." The words spoken by the small mouth in the small voice had a kind of childish ferocity.

The travellers turned their back on him and continued their way.

"Sich a curmudgeon!" Dickson commented. His face had flushed, for he was susceptible to rudeness. "Did you notice? That man's a foreigner."

"He's a brute," said Heritage. "But I'm not going to be done in by that class of lad. There can be no gates on the sea side, so we'll work round that way, for I won't sleep till I've seen the place."

Presently the trees grew thinner, and the road plunged through thickets of hazel till it came to a sudden stop in a field. There the cover ceased wholly, and below them lay the glen of the Laver. Steep green banks descended to a stream which swept in coils of gold into the eye of the sunset. A little further down the channel broadened, the slopes fell back a little, and a tongue of glittering sea ran up to meet the hill waters. The Laver is a gentle stream after it leaves its cradle heights, a stream of clear pools and long bright shallows, winding by moorland steadings and upland meadows; but in its last half-mile it goes mad, and imitates its childhood when it tumbled over granite shelves. Down in that green place the crystal water gushed and frolicked as if determined on one hour of rapturous life before joining the sedater sea.

Heritage flung himself on the turf.

"This is a good place! Ye gods, what a good place! Dogson, aren't you glad you came? I think everything's bewitched to-night. That village is bewitched, and that old woman's tea. Good white magic! And that foul innkeeper and that brigand at the gate. Black magic! And now here is the home of all enchantment—'island valley of Avilion'

—‘waters that listen for lovers’—all the rest of it!’

Dickson observed and marvelled.

“I can’t make you out, Mr. Heritage. You were saying last night you were a great democrat, and yet you were objecting to yon laddies camping on the moor. And you very near bit the neb off me when I said I liked Tennyson. And now . . .” Mr. McCunn’s command of language was inadequate to describe the transformation.

“You’re a precise, pragmatistical Scot,” was the answer. “Hang it, man, don’t remind me that I’m inconsistent. I’ve a poet’s licence to play the fool, and if you don’t understand me, I don’t in the least understand myself. All I know is that I’m feeling young and jolly and that it’s the Spring.”

Mr. Heritage was assuredly in a strange mood. He began to whistle with a far-away look in his eye.

“Do you know what that is?” he asked suddenly.

Dickson, who could not detect any tune, said No.

“It’s an *aria* from a Russian opera that came out just before the war. I’ve forgotten the name of the fellow who wrote it. Jolly thing, isn’t it? I always remind myself of it when I’m in this mood, for it is linked with the greatest experience of my life. You said, I think, that you had never been in love?”

Dickson replied in the native fashion. “Have you?” he asked.

“I have, and I am—been for two years. I was down with my battalion on the Italian front early in 1918, and because I could speak the language they hoicked me out and sent me to Rome on a

liaison job. It was Easter time and fine weather and, being glad to get out of the trenches, I was pretty well pleased with myself and enjoying life. . . . In the place where I stayed there was a girl. She was a Russian, a princess of a great family, but a refugee and of course as poor as sin. . . . I remember how badly dressed she was among all the well-to-do Romans. But, my God, what a beauty! There was never anything in the world like her. . . . She was little more than a child, and she used to sing that air in the morning as she went down the stairs. . . . They sent me back to the front before I had a chance of getting to know her, but she used to give me little timid good mornings, and her voice and eyes were like an angel's. . . . I'm over my head in love, but it's hopeless, quite hopeless. I shall never see her again."

"I'm sure I'm honoured by your confidence," said Dickson reverently.

The Poet, who seemed to draw exhilaration from the memory of his sorrows, arose and fetched him a clout on the back. "Don't talk of confidence as if you were a reporter," he said. "What about that House? If we're to see it before the dark comes we'd better hustle."

The green slopes on their left, as they ran seaward, were clothed towards their summit with a tangle of broom and light scrub. The two forced their way through this, and found to their surprise that on this side there were no defences of the Huntingtower demesne. Along the crest ran a path which had once been gravelled and trimmed. Be-

yond through a thicket of laurels and rhododendrons they came on a long unkempt aisle of grass, which seemed to be one of those side avenues often found in connection with old Scots dwellings. Keeping along this they reached a grove of beech and holly through which showed a dim shape of masonry. By a common impulse they moved stealthily, crouching in cover, till at the far side of the wood they found a sunk fence and looked over an acre or two of what had once been lawn and flowerbeds to the front of the mansion.

The outline of the building was clearly silhouetted against the glowing west, but since they were looking at the east face the detail was all in shadow. But, dim as it was, the sight was enough to give Dickson the surprise of his life. He had expected something old and baronial. But this was new, raw and new, not twenty years built. Some madness had prompted its creator to set up a replica of a Tudor house in a countryside where the thing was unheard of. All the tricks were there—oriel windows, lozenged panes, high twisted chimney stacks; the very stone was red, as if to imitate the mellow brick of some ancient Kentish manor. It was new, but it was also decaying. The creepers had fallen from the walls, the pilasters on the terrace were tumbling down, lichen and moss were on the doorsteps. Shuttered, silent, abandoned, it stood like a harsh *memento mori* of human hopes.

Dickson had never before been affected by an inanimate thing with so strong a sense of disquiet. He had pictured an old stone tower on a bright

headland; he found instead this raw thing among trees. The decadence of the brand-new repels as something against nature, and this new thing was decadent. But there was a mysterious life in it, for though not a chimney smoked, it seemed to enshrine a personality and to wear a sinister *aura*. He felt a lively distaste, which was almost fear. He wanted to get far away from it as fast as possible. The sun, now sinking very low, sent up rays which kindled the crests of a group of firs to the left of the front door. He had the absurd fancy that they were torches flaming before a bier.

It was well that the two had moved quietly and kept in shadow. Footsteps fell on their ears, on the path which threaded the lawn just beyond the sunk-fence. It was the keeper of the West Lodge and he carried something on his back, but both that and his face were indistinct in the half-light.

Other footsteps were heard, coming from the other side of the lawn. A man's shod feet rang on the stone of a flagged path, and from their irregular fall it was plain that he was lame. The two men met near the door, and spoke together. Then they separated, and moved one down each side of the house. To the two watchers they had the air of a patrol, or of warders pacing the corridors of a prison.

"Let's get out of this," said Dickson, and turned to go.

The air had the curious stillness which precedes the moment of sunset, when the birds of day have stopped their noises and the sounds of night have

not begun. But suddenly in the silence fell notes of music. They seemed to come from the house, a voice singing softly but with great beauty and clearness.

Dickson halted in his steps. The tune, whatever it was, was like a fresh wind to blow aside his depression. The house no longer looked sepulchral. He saw that the two men had hurried back from their patrol, had met and exchanged some message, and made off again as if alarmed by the music. Then he noticed his companion. . . .

Heritage was on one knee with his face rapt and listening. He got to his feet and appeared to be about to make for the House. Dickson caught him by the arm and dragged him into the bushes, and he followed unresistingly, like a man in a dream. They ploughed through the thicket, recrossed the grass avenue, and scrambled down the hillside to the banks of the stream.

Then for the first time Dickson observed that his companion's face was very white, and that sweat stood on his temples. Heritage lay down and lapped up water like a dog. Then he turned a wild eye on the other.

"I am going back," he said. "That is the voice of the girl I saw in Rome, and it is singing her song!"

CHAPTER IV

DOUGAL

"YOU'LL do nothing of the kind," said Dickson. "You're coming home to your supper. It was to be on the chap of nine."

"I'm going back to that place."

The man was clearly demented and must be humoured. "Well, you must wait till the morn's morning. It's very near dark now, and those are two ugly customers wandering about yonder. You'd better sleep the night on it."

Mr. Heritage seemed to be persuaded. He suffered himself to be led up the now dusky slopes to the gate where the road from the village ended. He walked listlessly like a man engaged in painful reflection. Once only he broke the silence.

"You heard the singing?" he asked.

Dickson was a very poor hand at a lie. "I heard something," he admitted.

"You heard a girl's voice singing?"

"It sounded like that," was the admission. "But I'm thinking it might have been a seagull."

"You're a fool," said the Poet rudely.

The return was a melancholy business, compared to the bright speed of the outward journey. Dickson's mind was a chaos of feelings, all of them unpleasant. He had run up against something

which he violently, blindly detested, and the trouble was that he could not tell why. It was all perfectly absurd, for why on earth should an ugly house, some overgrown trees and a couple of ill-favoured servants so malignly affect him? Yet this was the fact; he had strayed out of Arcady into a sphere that filled him with revolt and a nameless fear. Never in his experience had he felt like this, this foolish childish panic which took all the colour and zest out of life. He tried to laugh at himself but failed. Heritage, stumbling alone by his side, effectually crushed his effort to discover humour in the situation. Some exhalation from that infernal place had driven the Poet mad. And then that voice singing! A seagull, he had said. More like a nightingale, he reflected—a bird which in the flesh he had never met.

Mrs. Morran had the lamp lit and a fire burning in her cheerful kitchen. The sight of it somewhat restored Dickson's equanimity, and to his surprise he found that he had an appetite for supper. There was new milk, thick with cream, and most of the dainties which had appeared at tea, supplemented by a noble dish of shimmering "potted-head." The hostess did not share their meal, being engaged in some duties in the little cubby-hole known as the back kitchen.

Heritage drank a glass of milk but would not touch food.

"I called this place Paradise four hours ago," he said. "So it is, but I fancy it is next door to Hell. There is something devilish going on inside that

park wall and I mean to get to the bottom of it."

"Hoots! Nonsense!" Dickson replied with affected cheerfulness. "To-morrow you and me will take the road for Auchenlochan. We needn't trouble ourselves about an ugly old house and a wheen impident lodge-keepers."

"To-morrow I'm going to get inside the place. Don't come unless you like, but it's no use arguing with me. My mind is made up."

Heritage cleared a space on the table and spread out a section of a large-scale Ordnance map.

"I must clear my head about the topography, the same as if this were a battle-ground. Look here, Dogson. . . . The road past the inn that we went by to-night runs north and south." He tore a page from a note-book and proceeded to make a rough sketch. The War had made him an adept at maps, but Dickson was hard put to it to follow his rapid exposition. . . . "One end we know abuts on the Laver glen, and the other stops at the South Lodge. Inside the wall which follows the road is a long belt of plantation—mostly beeches and ash—then to the west a kind of park, and beyond that the lawns of the house. Strips of plantation with avenues between follow the north and south sides of the park. On the sea side of the House are the stables and what looks like a walled garden, and beyond them what seems to be open ground with an old dovecot marked and the ruins of Huntingtower keep. Beyond that there is more open ground, till you come to the cliffs of the cape. Have you got that? . . . It looks possible from the contouring to get on to

the sea cliffs by following the Laver, for all that side is broken up into ravines. . . . But look at the other side—the Garple glen. It's evidently a deep-cut gully, and at the bottom it opens out into a little harbour. There's deep water there, you observe. Now the House on the south side—the Garple side—is built fairly close to the edge of the cliffs. Is that all clear in your head? We can't reconnoitre unless we've got a working notion of the lie of the land."

Dickson was about to protest that he had no intention of reconnoitring, when a hubbub arose in the back kitchen. Mrs. Morran's voice was heard in shrill protest.

"Ye ill laddie! Eh—ye—ill—laddie! [*crescendo*] Makin' a hash o' my back door wi' your dirty feet! What are ye slinkin' roond here for, when I tell't ye this mornin' that I wad sell ye nae mair scones till ye paid for the last lot? Ye're a wheen thievin' hungry callants, and if there were a polisman in the place I'd gie ye in chairge. . . . What's that ye say? Ye're no' wantin' meat? Ye want to speak to the gentlemen that's bidin' here? Ye ken the auld ane, says you? I believe it's a muckle lee, but there's the gentlemen to answer ye theirsels."

Mrs. Morran, brandishing a dishclout dramatically, flung open the door, and with a vigorous push propelled into the kitchen a singular figure.

It was a stunted boy, who from his face might have been fifteen years old, but had the stature of a child of twelve. He had a thatch of fiery red hair above a pale freckled countenance. His nose

was snub, his eyes a sulky grey-green, and his wide mouth disclosed large and damaged teeth. But remarkable as was his visage, his clothing was still stranger. On his head was the regulation Boy Scout hat, but it was several sizes too big, and was squashed down upon his immense red ears. He wore a very ancient khaki shirt, which had once belonged to a full-grown soldier, and the spacious sleeves were rolled up at the shoulders and tied with string, revealing a pair of skinny arms. Round his middle hung what was meant to be a kilt—a kilt of home manufacture, which may once have been a tablecloth, for its bold pattern suggested no known clan tartan. He had a massive belt, in which was stuck a broken gully-knife, and round his neck was knotted the remnant of what had once been a silk bandana. His legs and feet were bare, blue, scratched, and very dirty, and his toes had the prehensile look common to monkeys and small boys who summer and winter go bootless. In his hand was a long ash-pole, new cut from some coppice.

The apparition stood glum and lowering on the kitchen floor. As Dickson stared at it he recalled Mearns Street and the band of irregular Boy Scouts who paraded to the roll of tin cans. Before him stood Dougal, Chieftain of the Gorbals Die-Hards. Suddenly he remembered the philanthropic Mackintosh, and his own subscription of ten pounds to the camp fund. It pleased him to find the rascals here, for in the unpleasant affairs on the verge of which he felt himself they were a comforting reminder of the peace of home.

"I'm glad to see you, Dougal," he said pleasantly. "How are you all getting on?" And then, with a vague reminiscence of the Scouts' code—"Have you been minding to perform a good deed every day?"

The Chieftain's brow darkened.

"*'Good deeds!'*" he repeated bitterly. "I tell ye I'm fair wore out wi' good deeds. Yon man Mackintosh tell't me this was going to be a grand holiday. Holiday! Govey Dick! It's been like a Setterday night in Main Street—a' fechtin', fechtin'."

No collocation of letters could reproduce Dougal's accent, and I will not attempt it. There was a touch of Irish in it, a spice of music-hall patter, as well as the odd lilt of the Glasgow vernacular. He was strong in vowels, but the consonants, especially the letter "t," were only aspirations.

"Sit down and let's hear about things," said Dickson.

The boy turned his head to the still open back door, where Mrs. Morran could be heard at her labours. He stepped across and shut it. "I'm no' wantin' that auld wife to hear," he said. Then he squatted down on the patchwork rug by the hearth, and warmed his blue-black shins. Looking into the glow of the fire, he observed, "I seen you two up by the Big Hoose the night."

"The devil you did," said Heritage, roused to a sudden attention. "And where were you?"

"Seven feet from your head, up a tree. It's my chief hidy-hole, and Gosh! I need one, for Lean's

after me wi' a gun. He got a shot at me two days syne."

Dickson exclaimed, and Dougal with morose pride showed a rent in his kilt. "If I had had on breeks, he'd ha' got me."

"Who's Lean?" Heritage asked.

"The man wi' the black coat. The other—the lame one—they ca' Spittal."

"How d'you know?"

"I've listened to them crackin' thegither."

"But what for did the man want to shoot at you?" asked the scandalised Dickson.

"What for? Because they're frightened to death o' onybody going near their auld Hoose. They're a pair of deevils, worse nor any Red Indian, but for a' that they're sweatin' wi' fright. What for? says you. Because they're hidin' a Secret. I knew it as soon as I seen the man Lean's face. I once seer. the same kind o' scoondrel at the Picters. When he opened his mouth to swear, I kenned he was a foreigner, like the lads down at the Broomielaw. That looked black, but I hadn't got at the worst of it. Then he loosed off at me wi' his gun."

"Were you not feared?" said Dickson.

"Ay, I was feared. But ye'll no' choke off the Gorbals Die-Hards wi' a gun. We held a meetin' round the camp fire, and we resolved to get to the bottom o' the business. Me bein' their Chief, it was my duty to make what they ca' a reckonissince, for that was the dangerous job. So a' this day I've

been going on my belly about thae policies. I've found out some queer things."

Heritage had risen and was staring down at the small squatting figure.

"What have you found out? Quick. Tell me at once." His voice was sharp and excited.

"Bide a wee," said the unwinking Dougal. "I'm no' going to let ye into this business till I ken that ye'll help. It's a far bigger job than I thought. There's more in it than Lean and Spittal. There's the big man that keeps the public—Dobson, they ca' him. He's a Namerican, which looks bad. And there's two-three tinklers campin' down in the Garple Dean. They're in it, for Dobson was colloguin' wi' them a' mornin'. When I seen ye, I thought ye were more o' the gang, till I mindit that one o' ye was auld McCunn that has the shop in Mearns Street. I seen that ye didn't like the look o' Lean, and I followed ye here, for I was thinkin' I needit help."

Heritage plucked Dougal by the shoulder and lifted him to his feet.

"For God's sake, boy," he cried, "tell us what you know!"

"Will ye help?"

"Of course, you little fool."

"Then swear," said the ritualist. From a grimy wallet he extracted a limp little volume which proved to be a damaged copy of a work entitled *Sacred Songs and Solos*. "Here! Take that in your right hand and put your left hand on my pole,

and say after me, 'I swear no' to blab what is telled me in secret and to be swift and sure in obeyin' orders, s'help me God!' Syne kiss the bookie."

Dickson at first refused, declaring it was all havers, but Heritage's docility persuaded him to follow suit. The two were sworn.

"Now," said Heritage.

Dougal squatted again on the hearth-rug, and gathered the eyes of his audience. He was enjoying himself.

"This day," he said slowly, "I got inside the Hoose."

"Stout fellow," said Heritage; "and what did you find there?"

"I got inside that Hoose, but it wasn't once or twice I tried. I found a corner where I was out o' sight o' anybody unless they had come there seekin' me, and I skimmed up a rone pipe, but a' the windies were lockit and I verra near broke my neck. Syne I tried the roof, and a sore sklim I had, but when I got there there were no skylights. At the end I got in by the coal-hole. That's why ye're maybe thinkin' I'm no' very clean."

Heritage's patience was nearly exhausted.

"I don't want to hear how you got in. What did you find, you little devil?"

"Inside the Hoose," said Dougal slowly (and there was a melancholy sense of anti-climax in his voice, as of one who had hoped to speak of gold and jewels and armed men)—"inside that Hoose there's nothing but two women."

Heritage sat down before him with a stern face.

"Describe them," he commanded.

"One o' them is dead auld, as auld as the wife here. She didn't look to me very right in the head."

"And the other?"

"Oh, just a lassie."

"What was she like?"

Dougal seemed to be searching for adequate words. "She is . . ." he began. Then a popular song gave him inspiration. "She's pure as the lully in the dell!"

In no way discomposed by Heritage's fierce interrogatory air, he continued: "She's either foreign or English, for she couldn't understand what I said, and I could make nothing o' her clippit tongue. But I could see she had been greetin'. She looked feared, yet kind o' determined. I speired if I could do anything for her, and when she got my meaning she was terrible anxious to ken if I had seen a man—a big man, she said, wi' a yellow beard. She didn't seem to ken his name, or else she wouldn't tell me. The auld wife was mortal feared, and was aye speakin' in a foreign langwidge. I seen at once that what frightened them was Lean and his friends, and I was just starting to speir about them when there came a sound like a man walkin' along the passage. She was for hidin' me in behind a sofy, but I wasn't going to be trapped like that, so I got out by the other door and down the kitchen stairs and into the coal-hole. Gosh, it was a near thing!"

The boy was on his feet. "I must be off to the camp to give out the orders for the morn. I'm

going back to that Hoose, for it's a fight atween the Gorbals Die-Hards and the scoundrels that are frightenin' thae women. The question is, Are ye comin' with me? Mind, ye've sworn. But if ye're no', I'm going mysel', though I'll no' deny I'd be glad o' company. *You* anyway——" he added, nodding at Heritage. "Maybe auld McCunn wouldn't get through the coal-hole."

"You're an impident laddie," said the outraged Dickson. "It's no' likely we're coming with you. Breaking into other folks' houses! It's a job for the police!"

"Please yersel'," said the Chieftain and looked at Heritage.

"I'm on," said that gentleman.

"Well, just you set out the morn as if ye were for a walk up the Garple glen. I'll be on the road and I'll have orders for ye."

Without more ado Dougal left by way of the back kitchen. There was a brief denunciation from Mrs. Morran, then the outer door banged and he was gone.

The Poet sat still with his head in his hands, while Dickson, acutely uneasy, prowled about the floor. He had forgotten even to light his pipe.

"You'll not be thinking of heeding that ragamuffin boy," he ventured.

"I'm certainly going to get into the House tomorrow," Heritage answered, "and if he can show me a way so much the better. He's a spirited youth. Do you breed many like him in Glasgow?"

"Plenty," said Dickson sourly. "See here, Mr.

Heritage. You can't expect me to be going about burgling houses on the word of a blagyird laddie. I'm a respectable man—aye been. Besides, I'm here for a holiday, and I've no call to be mixing myself up in strangers' affairs."

"You haven't. Only, you see, I think there's a friend of mine in that place, and anyhow there are women in trouble. If you like, we'll say good-bye after breakfast, and you can continue as if you had never turned aside to this damned peninsula. But I've got to stay."

Dickson groaned. What had become of his dream of idylls, his gentle bookish romance? Vanished before a reality which smacked horribly of crude melodrama and possibly of sordid crime. His gorge rose at the picture, but a thought troubled him. Perhaps all romance in its hour of happening was rough and ugly like this, and only shone rosy in the retrospect. Was he being false to his deepest faith?

"Let's have Mrs. Morran in," he ventured. "She's a wise old body and I'd like to hear her opinion of this business. We'll get common sense from her."

"I don't object," said Heritage. "But no amount of common sense will change my mind."

Their hostess forestalled them by returning at that moment to the kitchen.

"We want your advice, mistress," Dickson told her, and accordingly, like a barrister with a client, she seated herself carefully in the big easy chair, found and adjusted her spectacles, and waited with

hands folded on her lap to hear the business. Dickson narrated their pre-supper doings, and gave a sketch of Dougal's evidence. His exposition was cautious and colourless, and without conviction. He seemed to expect a robust incredulity in his hearer.

Mrs. Morran listened with the gravity of one in church. When Dickson finished she seemed to meditate.

"There's no blagyard trick that would surprise me in thae new folk. What's that ye ca' them—Lean and Spittal? Eppie Home threepit to me they were furriners and these are no furrin names."

"What I want to hear from you, Mrs. Morran," said Dickson impressively, "is whether you think there's anything in that boy's story?"

"I think it's maist likely true. He's a terrible impident callant, but he's no' a leear."

"Then you think that a gang of ruffians have got two lone women shut up in that House for their own purposes?"

"I wadna wonder."

"But it's ridiculous! This is a Christian and law-abiding country. What would the police say?"

"They never troubled Dalquharter muckle. There's no' a polisman nearer than Knockraw—yin Johnnie Trummle, and he's as useless as a frostit tattie."

"The wiselike thing, as I think," said Dickson, "would be to turn the Procurator-Fiscal on to the job. It's his business, no' ours."

"Weel, I wadna say but ye're richt," said the lady.

"What would you do if you were us?" Dickson's tone was subtly confidential. "My friend here wants to get into the House the morn with that red-haired laddie to satisfy himself about the facts. I say no. Let sleeping dogs lie, I say, and if you think the beasts are mad report to the authorities. What would you do yourself?"

"If I were you," came the emphatic reply, "I would tak' the first train hame the morn, and when I got hame I wad bide there. Ye're a dacent body, but ye're no' the kind to be traivellin' the roads."

"And if you were me?" Heritage asked with his queer crooked smile.

"If I was a young and yauld like you I wad gang into the Hoose, and I wadna rest till I had riddled oot the truith and jyled every scoondrel about the place. If ye dinna gang, 'faith I'll kilt my coats and gang mysel'. I havena served the Kennedys for forty year no' to hae the honour o' the Hoose at my hert. . . . Ye speired my advice, sirs, and ye've gotten it. Now I maun clear awa' your supper."

Dickson asked for a candle, and, as on the previous night, went abruptly to bed. The oracle of prudence to which he had appealed had betrayed him and counselled folly. But was it folly? For him, assuredly, for Dickson McCunn, late of Mearns Street, Glasgow, wholesale and retail provision merchant, elder in the Guthrie Memorial Kirk, and fifty-five years of age. Ay, that was the rub. He was getting old. The woman had seen it and had advised him to go home. Yet the plea

was curiously irksome, though it gave him the excuse he needed. If you played at being young, you had to take up the obligations of youth, and he thought derisively of his boyish exhilaration of the past days. Derisively, but also sadly. What had become of that innocent joviality he had dreamed of, that happy morning pilgrimage of Spring enlivened by tags from the poets? His goddess had played him false. Romance had put upon him too hard a trial.

He lay long awake, torn between common sense and a desire to be loyal to some vague whimsical standard. Heritage a yard distant appeared also to be sleepless, for the bed creaked with his turning. Dickson found himself envying one whose troubles, whatever they might be, were not those of a divided mind.

CHAPTER V

OF THE PRINCESS IN THE TOWER

VERY early next morning, while Mrs. Morran was still cooking breakfast, Dickson and Heritage might have been observed taking the air in the village street. It was the Poet who had insisted upon this walk, and he had his own purpose. They looked at the spires of smoke piercing the windless air, and studied the daffodils in the cottage gardens. Dickson was glum, but Heritage seemed in high spirits. He varied his garrulity with spells of cheerful whistling.

They strode along the road by the park wall till they reached the inn. There Heritage's music waxed peculiarly loud. Presently from the yard, unshaven and looking as if he had slept in his clothes, came Dobson the innkeeper.

"Good morning," said the Poet. "I hope the sickness in your house is on the mend?"

"Thank ye, it's no worse," was the reply, but in the man's heavy face there was little civility. His small grey eyes searched their faces.

"We're just waiting on breakfast to get on the road again. I'm jolly glad we spent the night here. We found quarters after all, you know."

"So I see. Whereabouts, may I ask?"

"Mrs. Morran's. We could always have got in

there, but we didn't want to fuss an old lady, so we thought we'd try the inn first. She's my friend's aunt."

At this amazing falsehood Dickson started, and the man observed his surprise. The eyes were turned on him like a searchlight. They roused antagonism in his peaceful soul, and with that antagonism came an impulse to back up the Poet. "Ay," he said, "she's my Auntie Phemie, my mother's half-sister."

The man turned on Heritage.

"Where are ye for the day?"

"Auchenlochan," said Dickson hastily. He was still determined to shake the dust of Dalquharter from his feet.

The innkeeper sensibly brightened. "Well, ye'll have a fine walk. I must go in and see about my own breakfast. Good day to ye, gentlemen."

"That," said Heritage as they entered the village street again, "is the first step in camouflage, to put the enemy off his guard."

"It was an abominable lie," said Dickson crossly.

"Not at all. It was a necessary and proper *ruse de guerre*. It explained why we spent the night here, and now Dobson and his friends can get about their day's work with an easy mind. Their suspicions are temporarily allayed, and that will make our job easier."

"I'm not coming with you."

"I never said you were. By 'we' I refer to myself and the red-headed boy."

"Mistress, you're my auntie," Dickson informed

Mrs. Morran as she set the porridge on the table. "This gentleman has just been telling the man at the inn that you're my Auntie Phemie."

For a second their hostess looked bewildered. Then the corners of her prim mouth moved upwards in a slow smile. *He Hermit looked at her*

"I see," she said. "Weel, maybe it was weel done. But if ye're my nevoy ye'll hae to keep up my credit, for we're a bauld and siccar lot."

Half an hour later there was a furious dissension when Dickson attempted to pay for the night's entertainment. Mrs. Morran would have none of it. "Ye're no' awa' yet," she said tartly, and the matter was complicated by Heritage's refusal to take part in the debate. He stood aside and grinned, till Dickson in despair returned his note-case to his pocket, murmuring darkly that "he would send it from Glasgow."

The road to Auchenlochan left the main village street at right angles by the side of Mrs. Morran's cottage. It was a better road than that which they had come yesterday, for by it twice daily the post-cart travelled to the post-town. It ran on the edge of the moor and on the lip of the Garple glen, till it crossed that stream and, keeping near the coast, emerged after five miles into the cultivated flats of the Lochan valley. The morning was fine, the keen air invited to high spirits, plovers piped entrancingly over the bent and linnets sang in the whins, there was a solid breakfast behind him, and the promise of a cheerful road till luncheon. The stage was set for good humour, but Dickson's heart, which

should have been ascending with the larks, stuck leadenly in his boots. He was not even relieved at putting Dalquharter behind him. The atmosphere of that unhallowed place lay still on his soul. He hated it, but he hated himself more. Here was one, who had hugged himself all his days as an adventurer waiting his chance, running away at the first challenge of adventure; a lover of Romance who fled from the earliest overture of his goddess. He was ashamed and angry, but what else was there to do? Burglary in the company of a queer poet and a queerer urchin? It was unthinkable.

Presently as they tramped silently on they came to the bridge beneath which the peaty waters of the Garple ran in porter-coloured pools and tawny cascades. From a clump of elders on the other side Dougal emerged. A barefoot boy, dressed in much the same parody of a Boy Scout's uniform, but with corduroy shorts instead of a kilt, stood before him at rigid attention. Some command was issued, the child saluted, and trotted back past the travellers with never a look at them. Discipline was strong among the Gorbals Die-Hards; no Chief of Staff ever conversed with his General under a stricter etiquette.

Dougal received the travellers with the condescension of a regular towards civilians.

"They're off their gawrd," he announced. "Thomas Yownie has been shadowin' them since skreigh o' day, and he reports that Dobson and Lean followed ye till ye were out o' sight o' the houses, and syne Lean got a spy-glass and watched

ye till the road turned in among the trees. That satisfied them, and they're both away back to their jobs. Thomas Yownie's the fell yin. Ye'll no fickle Thomas Yownie."

Dougal extricated from his pouch the fag of a cigarette, lit it and puffed meditatively. "I did a reckonissince mysel' this morning. I was up at the Hoose afore it was light, and tried the door o' the coal-hole. I doot they've gotten on our tracks, for it was lockit—ay, and wedged from the inside."

Dickson brightened. Was the insane venture off?

"For a wee bit I was fair beat. But I mindit that the lassie was allowed to walk in a kind o' a glass hoose on the side farthest away from the Garple. That was where she was singin' yest'reen. So I reckonissined in that direction, and I fund a queer place." *Sacred Songs and Solos* was requisitioned, and on a page of it Dougal proceeded to make marks with the stump of a carpenter's pencil. "See here," he commanded. "There's the glass place wi' a door into the Hoose. That door must be open or the lassie must have the key, for she comes there whenever she likes. Now, at each end o' the place the doors are lockit, but the front that looks on the garden is open, wi' muckle posts and flower-pots. The trouble is that that side there's maybe twenty feet o' a wall between the pawrapet and the ground. It's an auld wall wi' cracks and holes in it, and it wouldn't be ill to sklim. That's why they let her gang there when she wants, for a lassie couldn't get away without breakin' her neck."

"Could we climb it?" Heritage asked.

The boy wrinkled his brows. "I could manage it mysel'—I think—and maybe you. I doubt if auld McCunn could get up. Ye'd have to be mighty carefu' that nobody saw ye, for your hinder end, as ye were sklimmin', wad be a grand mark for a gun."

"Lead on," said Heritage. "We'll try the verandah."

They both looked at Dickson, and Dickson, scarlet in the face, looked back at them. He had suddenly found the thought of a solitary march to Auchenlochan intolerable. Once again he was at the parting of the ways, and once more caprice determined his decision. That the coal-hole was out of the question had worked a change in his views. Somehow it seemed to him less burglarious to enter by a verandah. He felt very frightened but—for the moment—quite resolute.

"I'm coming with you," he said.

"Sportsman," said Heritage and held out his hand. "Well done, the auld yin," said the Chieftain of the Gorbals Die-Hards. Dickson's quaking heart experienced a momentary bound as he followed Heritage down the track into the Garple Dean.

The track wound through a thick covert of hazels, now close to the rushing water, now high upon the bank so that clear sky showed through the fringes of the wood. When they had gone a little way Dougal halted them.

"It's a ticklish job," he whispered. "There's the tinklers, mind, that's campin' in the Dean. If

they're still in their camp we can get by easy enough, but they're maybe wanderin' about the wud after rabbits. . . . Then we must ford the water, for ye'll no' cross it lower down where it's deep. . . . Our road is on the Hoose side o' the Dean and it's awfu' public if there's onybody on the other side, though it's hid well enough from folk up in the policies. . . . Ye must do exactly what I tell ye. When we get near danger I'll scout on ahead, and I daur ye to move a hair o' your head till I give the word."

Presently, when they were at the edge of the water, Dougal announced his intention of crossing. Three boulders in the stream made a bridge for an active man and Heritage hopped lightly over. Not so Dickson, who stuck fast on the second stone, and would certainly have fallen in had not Dougal plunged into the current and steadied him with a grimy hand. The leap was at last successfully taken, and the three scrambled up a rough scaur, all reddened with iron springs, till they struck a slender track running down the Dean on its northern side. Here the undergrowth was very thick, and they had gone the better part of half a mile before the covert thinned sufficiently to show them the stream beneath. Then Dougal halted them with a finger on his lips, and crept forward alone.

He returned in three minutes. "Coast's clear," he whispered. "The tinklers are eatin' their breakfast. They're late at their meat though they're up early seekin' it."

Progress was now very slow and secret and mainly

on all fours. At one point Dougal nodded downward, and the other two saw on a patch of turf, where the Garple began to widen into its estuary, a group of figures round a small fire. There were four of them, all men, and Dickson thought he had never seen such ruffianly-looking customers. After that they moved high up the slope, in a shallow glade of a tributary burn, till they came out of the trees and found themselves looking seaward.

On one side was the House, a hundred yards or so back from the edge, the roof showing above the precipitous scarp. Half-way down the slope became easier, a jumble of boulders and boiler-plates, till it reached the waters of the small haven, which lay calm as a mill-pond in the windless forenoon. The haven broadened out at its foot and revealed a segment of blue sea. The opposite shore was flatter and showed what looked like an old wharf and the ruins of buildings, behind which rose a bank clad with scrub and surmounted by some gnarled and wind-crooked firs.

"There's dashed little cover here," said Heritage.

"There's no muckle," Dougal assented. "But they canna see us from the policies, and it's no' like there's anybody watchin' from the Hoose. The danger is somebody on the other side, but we'll have to risk it. Once among thae big stones we're safe. Are ye ready?"

Five minutes later Dickson found himself gasping in the lee of a boulder, while Dougal was making a cast forward. The scout returned with a hopeful report. "I think we're safe, till we get

into the policies. There's a road that the auld folk made when ships used to come here. Down there it's deeper than Clyde at the Broomilaw. Has the auld yin got his wind yet? There's no time to waste."

Up that broken hillside they crawled, well in the cover of the tumbled stones, till they reached a low wall which was the boundary of the garden. The House was now behind them on their right rear, and as they topped the crest they had a glimpse of an ancient dovecot and the ruins of the old Hunting-tower on the short thymy turf which ran seaward to the cliffs. Dougal led them along a sunk fence which divided the downs from the lawns behind the house, and, avoiding the stables, brought them by devious ways to a thicket of rhododendrons and broom. On all fours they travelled the length of the place, and came to the edge where some forgotten gardeners had once tended a herbaceous border. The border was now rank and wild, and, lying flat under the shade of an azalea, and peering through the young spears of iris, Dickson and Heritage regarded the north-western façade of the house.

The ground before them had been a sunken garden, from which a steep wall, once covered with creepers and rock plants, rose to a long verandah, which was pillared and open on that side; but at each end built up half-way and glazed for the rest. There was a glass roof, and inside untended shrubs sprawled in broken plaster vases.

"Ye must bide here," said Dougal, "and no cheep above your breath. Afore we dare to try that wall,

I must ken where Lean and Spittal and Dobson are. I'm off to spy the policies." He glided out of sight behind a clump of pampas grass.

For hours, so it seemed, Dickson was left to his own unpleasant reflections. His body, prone on the moist earth, was fairly comfortable, but his mind was ill at ease. The scramble up the hillside had convinced him that he was growing old, and there was no rebound in his soul to counter the conviction. He felt listless, spiritless—an apathy with fright trembling somewhere at the back of it. He regarded the verandah wall with foreboding. How on earth could he climb that? And if he did there would be his exposed hinder-parts inviting a shot from some malevolent gentleman among the trees. He reflected that he would give a large sum of money to be out of this preposterous adventure.

Heritage's hand was stretched towards him, containing two of Mrs. Morran's jellied scones, of which the Poet had been wise enough to bring a supply in his pocket. The food cheered him, for he was growing very hungry, and he began to take an interest in the scene before him instead of his own thoughts. He observed every detail of the verandah. There was a door at one end, he noted, giving on a path which wound down to the sunk garden. As he looked he heard a sound of steps and saw a man ascending this path.

It was the lame man whom Dougal had called Spittal, the dweller in the South Lodge. Seen at closer quarters he was an odd-looking being, lean as a heron, wry-necked, but amazingly quick on his

feet. Had not Mrs. Morran said that he hobbled as fast as other folk ran? He kept his eyes on the ground and seemed to be talking to himself as he went, but he was alert enough, for the dropping of a twig from a dying magnolia transferred him in an instant into a figure of active vigilance. No risks could be run with that watcher. He took a key from his pocket, opened the garden door and entered the verandah. For a moment his shuffle sounded on its tiled floor, and then he entered the door admitting from the verandah to the House. It was clearly unlocked for there came no sound of a turning key.

Dickson had finished the last crumbs of his scones before the man emerged again. He seemed to be in a greater hurry than ever, as he locked the garden door behind him and hobbled along the west front of the House till he was lost to sight. After that the time passed slowly. A pair of yellow wag-tails arrived and played at hide-and-seek among the stuccoed pillars. The little dry scratch of their claws was heard clearly in the still air. Dickson had almost fallen asleep when a smothered exclamation from Heritage woke him to attention. A girl had appeared in the verandah.

Above the parapet he saw only her body from the waist up. She seemed to be clad in bright colours, for something red was round her shoulders and her hair was bound with an orange scarf. She was tall—that he could tell, tall and slim and very young. Her face was turned seaward, and she stood for a little scanning the broad channel, shad-

ing her eyes as if to search for something on the extreme horizon. The air was very quiet and he thought that he could hear her sigh. Then she turned and re-entered the House, while Heritage by his side began to curse under his breath with a shocking fervour.

One of Dickson's troubles had been that he did not really believe Dougal's story, and the sight of the girl removed one doubt. That bright exotic thing did not belong to the Cruives or to Scotland at all, and that she should be in the House removed the place from the conventional dwelling to which the laws against burglary applied.

There was a rustle among the rhododendrons and the fiery face of Dougal appeared. He lay between the other two, his chin on his hands, and grunted out his report.

"After they had their dinner Dobson and Lean yokit a horse and went off to Auchenlochan. I seen them pass the Garple brig, so that's two accounted for. Has Spittal been round here?"

"Half an hour ago," said Heritage, consulting a wrist watch.

"It was him that keepit me waitin' so long. But he's safe enough now, for five minutes syne he was splittin' firewood at the back door o' his hoose. . . . I've found a ladder, an' auld yin in ahint yon lot o' bushes. It'll help wi' the wall. There! I've gotten my breath again and we can start."

The ladder was fetched by Heritage and proved to be ancient and wanting many rungs, but sufficient in length. The three stood silent for a moment,

listening like stags, and then ran across the intervening lawn to the foot of the verandah wall. Dougal went up first, then Heritage, and lastly Dickson, stiff and giddy from his long lie under the bushes. Below the parapet the verandah floor was heaped with old garden litter, rotten matting, dead or derelict bulbs, fibre, withies and strawberry nets. It was Dougal's intention to pull up the ladder and hide it among the rubbish against the hour of departure. But Dickson had barely put his foot on the parapet when there was a sound of steps within the House approaching the verandah door.

The ladder was left alone. Dougal's hand brought Dickson summarily to the floor, where he was fairly well concealed by a mess of matting. Unfortunately his head was in the vicinity of some upturned pot-plants, so that a cactus ticked his brow and a spike of aloe supported painfully the back of his neck. Heritage was prone behind two old water-butts, and Dougal was in a hamper which had once contained seed potatoes. The house door had panels of opaque glass, so the new-comer could not see the doings of the three till it was opened, and by that time all were in cover.

The man—it was Spittal—walked rapidly along the verandah and out of the garden door. He was talking to himself again, and Dickson, who had a glimpse of his face, thought he looked both evil and furious. Then came some anxious moments, for had the man glanced back when he was once outside, he must have seen the tell-tale ladder. But he seemed immersed in his own reflections, for he

hobbled steadily along the house front till he was lost to sight.

"That'll be the end o' them the night," said Dougal, as he helped Heritage to pull up the ladder and stow it away. "We've got the place to oursels, now. Forward, men, forward." He tried the handle of the house door and led the way in.

A narrow paved passage took them into what had once been the garden room, where the lady of the house had arranged her flowers, and the tennis racquets and croquet mallets had been kept. It was very dusty and on the cobwebbed walls still hung a few soiled garden overalls. A door beyond opened into a huge murky hall, murky, for the windows were shuttered, and the only light came through things like port-holes far up in the wall. Dougal, who seemed to know his way about, halted them. "Stop here till I scout a bit. The women bide in a wee room through that muckle door." Bare feet stole across the oak flooring, there was the sound of a door swinging on its hinges, and then silence and darkness. Dickson put out a hand for companionship and clutched Heritage's; to his surprise it was cold and all a-tremble. They listened for voices, and thought they could detect a far-away sob.

It was some minutes before Dougal returned. "A bonny kettle o' fish," he whispered. "They're both greetin'. We're just in time. Come on, the pair o' ye."

Through a green baize door they entered a passage which led to the kitchen regions, and turned

in at the first door on their right. From its situation Dickson calculated that the room lay on the seaward side of the House next to the verandah. The light was bad, for the two windows were partially shuttered, but it had plainly been a smoking-room, for there were pipe-racks by the hearth, and on the walls a number of old school and college photographs, a couple of oars with emblazoned names, and a variety of stags' and roebucks' heads. There was no fire in the grate, but a small oil-stove burned inside the fender. In a stiff-backed chair sat an elderly woman, who seemed to feel the cold, for she was muffled to the neck in a fur coat. Beside her, so that the late afternoon light caught her face and head, stood a girl.

Dickson's first impression was of a tall child. The pose, startled and wild and yet curiously stiff and self-conscious, was that of a child striving to remember a forgotten lesson. One hand clutched a handkerchief, the other was closing and unclosing on a knob of the chair back. She was staring at Dougal, who stood like a gnome in the centre of the floor. "Here's the gentlemen I was tellin' ye about," was his introduction, but her eyes did not move.

Then Heritage stepped forward. "We have met before, Mademoiselle," he said. "Do you remember Easter in 1918—in the house in the Trinitá dei Monte?"

The girl looked at him.

"I do not remember," she said slowly.

"But I was the English officer who had the

apartments on the floor below you. I saw you every morning. You spoke to me sometimes."

"You are a soldier?" she asked, with a new note in her voice.

"I was then—till the war finished."

"And now? Why have you come here?"

"To offer you help if you need it. If not, to ask your pardon and go away."

The shrouded figure in the chair burst suddenly into rapid hysterical talk in some foreign tongue which Dickson suspected of being French. Heritage replied in the same language, and the girl joined in with sharp questions. Then the Poet turned to Dickson.

"This is my friend. If you will trust us we will do our best to save you."

The eyes rested on Dickson's face, and he realised that he was in the presence of something the like of which he had never met in his life before? It was a loveliness greater than he had imagined was permitted by the Almighty to His creatures. The little face was more square than oval, with a low broad brow and proud exquisite eyebrows. The eyes were of a colour which he could never decide on; afterwards he used to allege obscurely that they were the colour of everything in Spring. There was a delicate pallor in the cheeks, and the face bore signs of suffering and care, possibly even of hunger; but for all that there was youth there, eternal and triumphant! Not youth such as he had known it, but youth with all history behind it, youth with centuries of command in its blood and the world's

treasures of beauty and pride in its ancestry. Strange, he thought, that a thing so fine should be so masterful. He felt abashed in every inch of him.

As the eyes rested on him their sorrowfulness seemed to be shot with humour. A ghost of a smile lurked there, to which Dickson promptly responded. He grinned and bowed.

"Very pleased to meet you, Mem. I'm Mr. McCunn from Glasgow."

"You don't even know my name," she said.

"We don't," said Heritage.

"They call me Saskia. This," nodding to the chair, "is my cousin Eugénie. . . . We are in very great trouble. But why should I tell you? I do not know you. You cannot help me."

"We can try," said Heritage. "Part of your trouble we know already through that boy. You are imprisoned in this place by scoundrels. We are here to help you to get out. We want to ask no questions—only to do what you bid us."

"You are not strong enough," she said sadly. "A young man—an old man—and a little boy. There are many against us, and any moment there may be more."

It was Dougal's turn to break in. "There's Lean and Spittal and Dobson and four tinklers in the Dean—that's seven; but there's us three and five more Gorbals Die-Hards—that's eight."

There was something in the boy's truculent courage that cheered her.

"I wonder," she said, and her eyes fell on each in turn.

Dickson felt impelled to intervene.

"I think this is a perfectly simple business. Here's a lady shut up in this house against her will by a wheen blagiyards. This is a free country and the law doesn't permit that. My advice is for one of us to inform the police at Auchenlochan and get Dobson and his friends took up and the lady set free to do what she likes. That is, if these folks are really molesting her, which is not yet quite clear to my mind."

"Alas! It is not so simple as that," she said. "I dare not invoke your English law, for perhaps in the eyes of that law I am a thief."

"Deary me, that's a bad business," said the startled Dickson.

The two women talked together in some strange tongue, and the elder appeared to be pleading and the younger objecting. Then Saskia seemed to come to a decision.

"I will tell you all," and she looked straight at Heritage. "I do not think you would be cruel or false, for you have honourable faces. . . . Listen, then. I am a Russian and for two years have been an exile. I will not speak of my house, for it is no more, or how I escaped, for it is the common tale of all of us. I have seen things more terrible than any dream and yet lived, but I have paid a price for such experience. First I went to Italy where there were friends, and I wished only to have peace among kindly people. About poverty I do not care, for, to us, who have lost all the great things, the want of bread is a little matter. But

peace was forbidden me, for I learned that we Russians had to win back our fatherland again and that the weakest must work in that cause. So I was set my task and it was very hard. . . . There were jewels which once belonged to my Emperor—they had been stolen by the brigands and must be recovered. There were others still hidden in Russia which must be brought to a safe place. In that work I was ordered to share."

She spoke in almost perfect English, with a certain foreign precision. Suddenly she changed to French, and talked rapidly to Heritage.

"She has told me about her family," he said, turning to Dickson. "It is among the greatest in Russia, the very greatest after the throne." Dickson could only stare.

"Our enemies soon discovered me," she went on. "Oh, but they are very clever, these enemies, and they have all the criminals of the world to aid them. Here you do not understand what they are. You good people in England think they are well-meaning dreamers who are forced into violence by the persecution of Western Europe. But you are wrong. Some honest fools there are among them, but the power—the true power—lies with madmen and degenerates, and they have for allies the special devil that dwells in each country. That is why they cast their net as wide as mankind."

She shivered, and for a second her face wore a look which Dickson never forgot, the look of one who has looked over the edge of life into the outer dark.

"There were certain jewels of great price which were about to be turned into guns and armies for our enemies. These our people recovered and the charge of them was laid on me. Who would suspect, they said, a foolish girl? But our enemies were very clever, and soon the hunt was cried against me. They tried to rob me of them, but they failed, for I too had become clever. Then they asked the help of the law—first in Italy and then in France. Oh, it was subtly done. Respectable bourgeois, who hated the Bolsheviks but had bought long ago the bonds of my country, desired to be repaid their debts out of the property of the Russian Crown which might be found in the West. But behind them were the Jews, and behind the Jews our unsleeping enemies. Once I was enmeshed in the law I would be safe for them, and presently they would find the hiding-place of the treasure, and while the bourgeois were clamouring in the courts, it would be safe in their pockets. So I fled. For months I have been fleeing and hiding. They have tried to kidnap me many times, and once they have tried to kill me, but I, too, have become very clever—oh, very clever. And I have learned not to fear."

This simple recital affected Dickson's honest soul with the liveliest indignation. "Sich doings!" he exclaimed, and he could not forbear from whispering to Heritage an extract from that gentleman's conversation the first night at Kirkmichael. "We needn't imitate all their methods, but they've got hold of the right end of the stick. They seek truth

and reality." The reply from the Poet was an angry shrug.

"Why and how did you come here?" he asked.

"I always meant to come to England, for I thought it the sanest place in a mad world. Also it is a good country to hide in, for it is apart from Europe, and your police, as I thought, do not permit evil men to be their own law. But especially I had a friend, a Scottish gentleman, whom I knew in the days when we Russians were still a nation. I saw him again in Italy, and since he was kind and brave I told him some part of my troubles. He was called Quentin Kennedy, and now he is dead. He told me that in Scotland he had a lonely château where I could hide secretly and safely, and against the day when I might be hard-pressed he gave me a letter to his steward, bidding him welcome me as a guest when I made application. At that time I did not think I would need such sanctuary, but a month ago the need became urgent, for the hunt in France was very close on me. So I sent a message to the steward as Captain Kennedy told me."

"What is his name?" Heritage asked.

She spelt it, "Monsieur Loudon—L-O-U-D-O-N in the town of Auchenlochan."

"The factor," said Dickson. "And what then?"

"Some spy must have found me out. I had a letter from this Loudon bidding me come to Auchenlochan. There I found no steward to receive me, but another letter saying that that night a carriage would be in waiting to bring me here. It was mid-

night when we arrived, and we were brought in by strange ways to this house, with no light but a single candle. Here we were welcomed indeed, but by an enemy."

"Which?" asked Heritage. "Dobson or Lean or Spittal?"

"Dobson I do not know. Léon was there. He is no Russian, but a Belgian who was a valet in my father's service till he joined the Bolsheviki. Next day the Lett Spidel came, and I knew that I was in very truth entrapped. For of all our enemies he is, save one, the most subtle and unwearied."

Her voice had trailed off into flat weariness. Again Dickson was reminded of a child, for her arms hung limp by her side; and her slim figure in its odd clothes was curiously like that of a boy in a school blazer. Another resemblance perplexed him. She had a hint of Janet—about the mouth—Janet, that solemn little girl those twenty years in her grave.

Heritage was wrinkling his brows. "I don't think I quite understand. The jewels? You have them with you?"

She nodded.

"These men wanted to rob you. Why didn't they do it between here and Auchenlochan? You had no chance to hide them on the journey. Why did they let you come here where you were in a better position to baffle them?"

She shook her head. "I cannot explain—except perhaps, that Spidel had not arrived that night, and Léon may have been waiting instructions."

The other still looked dissatisfied. "They are either clumsier villains than I take them to be, or there is something deeper in the business than we understand. These jewels—are they here?"

His tone was so sharp that she looked startled—almost suspicious. Then she saw that in his face which reassured her. "I have them hidden here. I have grown very skilful in hiding things."

"Have they searched for them?"

"The first day they demanded them of me. I denied all knowledge. Then they ransacked this house—I think they ransack it daily, but I am too clever for them. I am not allowed to go beyond the verandah, and when at first I disobeyed there was always one of them in wait to force me back with a pistol behind my head. Every morning Léon brings us food for the day—good food, but not enough, so that Cousin Eugénie is always hungry, and each day he and Spidel question and threaten me. This afternoon Spidel has told me that their patience is at an end. He has given me till to-morrow at noon to produce the jewels. If not, he says I will die."

"Mercy on us!" Dickson exclaimed.

"There will be no mercy for us," she said solemnly. "He and his kind think as little of shedding blood as of spilling water. But I do not think he will kill me. I think I will kill him first, but after that I shall surely die. As for Cousin Eugénie, I do not know."

Her level matter-of-fact tone seemed to Dickson most shocking, for he could not treat it as mere

melodrama. It carried a horrid conviction. "We must get you out of this at once," he declared.

"I cannot leave. I will tell you why. When I came to this country I appointed one to meet me here. He is a kinsman who knows England well, for he fought in your army. With him by my side I have no fear. It is altogether needful that I wait for him."

"Then there is something more which you haven't told us?" Heritage asked.

Was there the faintest shadow of a blush on her cheek? "There is something more," she said.

She spoke to Heritage in French and Dickson caught the name "Alexis" and a word which sounded like "prance." The Poet listened eagerly and nodded. "I have heard of him," he said.

"But have you not seen him? A tall man with a yellow beard, who bears himself proudly. Being of my mother's race he has eyes like mine."

"That's the man she was askin' me about yesterday," said Dougal, who had squatted on the floor.

Heritage shook his head. "We only came here last night. When did you expect Prince—your friend?"

"I hoped to find him here before me. Oh, it is his not coming that terrifies me. I must wait and hope. But if he does not come in time another may come before him."

"The ones already here are not all the enemies that threaten you?"

"Indeed, no. The worst has still to come, and till I know he is here I do not greatly fear Spidel

or Léon. They receive orders and do not give them."

Heritage ran a perplexed hand through his hair. The sunset which had been flaming for some time in the unshuttered panes was now passing into the dark. The girl lit a lamp after first shuttering the rest of the windows. As she turned it up the odd dusty room and its strange company were revealed more clearly and Dickson saw with a shock how haggard was the beautiful face. A great pity seized him and almost conquered his timidity.

"It is very difficult to help you," Heritage was saying. "You won't leave this place, and you won't claim the protection of the law. You are very independent, Mademoiselle, but it can't go on for ever. The man you fear may arrive at any moment. At any moment, too, your treasure may be discovered."

"It is that that weighs on me," she cried. "The jewels! They are my solemn trust, but they burden me terribly. If I were only rid of them and knew them to be safe I should face the rest with a braver mind."

"If you'll take my advice," said Dickson slowly, "you'll get them deposited in a bank and take a receipt for them. A Scotch bank is no' in a hurry to surrender a deposit without it gets the proper authority."

Heritage brought his hands together with a smack. "That's an idea. Will you trust us to take these things and deposit them safely?"

For a little she was silent and her eyes were fixed

on each of the trio in turn. "I will trust you," she said at last. "I think you will not betray me."

"By God, we won't!" said the Poet fervently. "Dogson, it's up to you. You march off to Glasgow in double quick time and place the stuff in your own name in your own bank. There's not a moment to lose. D'you hear?"

"I will that." To his own surprise Dickson spoke without hesitation. Partly it was because of his merchant's sense of property, which made him hate the thought that miscreants should acquire that to which they had no title; but mainly it was the appeal in those haggard childish eyes. "But I'm not going to be tramping the country in the night carrying a fortune and seeking for trains that aren't there. I'll go the first thing in the morning."

"Where are they?" Heritage asked.

"That I do not tell. But I will fetch them."

She left the room and presently returned with three odd little parcels wrapped in leather and tied with thongs of raw hide. She gave them to Heritage, who held them appraisingly in his hand and then passed them to Dickson.

"I do not ask about their contents. We take them from you as they are, and, please God, when the moment comes they will be returned to you as you gave them. You trust us, Mademoiselle?"

"I trust you, for you are a soldier. Oh, and I thank you from my heart, my friends." She held out a hand to each, which caused Heritage to grow suddenly very red.

"I will remain in the neighbourhood to await

developments," he said. "We had better leave you now. Dougal, lead on."

Before going, he took the girl's hand again, and with a sudden movement bent and kissed it. Dickson shook it heartily. "Cheer up, Mem," he observed. "There's a better time coming." His last recollection of her eyes was of a soft mistiness not far from tears. His pouch and pipe had strange company jostling them in his pocket as he followed the others down the ladder into the night.

Dougal insisted that they must return by the road of the morning. "We daren't go by the Laver, for that would bring us by the public-house. If the worst comes to the worst, and we fall in wi' any of the deevils, they must think ye've changed your mind and come back from Auchenlochan."

The night smelt fresh and moist as if a break in the weather were imminent. As they scrambled along the Garple Dean a pinprick of light below showed where the tinklers were busy by their fire. Dickson's spirits suffered a sharp fall and he began to marvel at his temerity. What in Heaven's name had he undertaken? To carry very precious things, to which certainly he had no right, through the enemy to distant Glasgow. How could he escape the notice of the watchers? He was already suspect, and the sight of him back again in Dalquharter would double that suspicion. He must brazen it out, but he distrusted his powers with such tell-tale stuff in his pockets. They might murder him anywhere on the moor road or in an empty railway carriage. An unpleasant memory of various novels he

had read in which such things happened haunted his mind. . . . There was just one consolation. This job over, he would be quit of the whole business. And honourably quit, too, for he would have played a manly part in a most unpleasant affair. He could retire to the idyllic with the knowledge that he had not been wanting when Romance called. Not a soul should ever hear of it, but he saw himself in the future tramping green roads or sitting by his winter fireside pleasantly retelling himself the tale.

Before they came to the Garple bridge Dougal insisted that they should separate, remarking that "it would never do if we were seen thegither." Heritage was despatched by a short cut over fields to the left, which eventually, after one or two plunges into ditches, landed him safely in Mrs. Morran's back yard. Dickson and Dougal crossed the bridge and tramped Dalquharter-wards by the highway. There was no sign of human life in that quiet place with owls hooting and rabbits rustling in the undergrowth. Beyond the woods they came in sight of the light in the back kitchen, and both seemed to relax their watchfulness when it was most needed. Dougal sniffed the air and looked seaward.

"It's coming on to rain," he observed. "There should be a muckle star there, and when you can't see it it means wet weather wi' this wind."

"What star?" Dickson asked.

"The one wi' the Irish-lukkin' name. What's that they call it? O'Brien?" And he pointed to where the constellation of the Hunter should have been declining on the western horizon.

There was a bend of the road behind them, and suddenly round it came a dogcart driven rapidly. Dougal slipped like a weasel into a bush, and presently Dickson stood revealed in the glare of a lamp. The horse was pulled up sharply and the driver called out to him. He saw that it was Dobson the innkeeper with Léon beside him.

"Who is it?" cried the voice. "Oh, you! I thought ye were off the day?"

Dickson rose nobly to the occasion.

"I thought myself I was. But I didn't think much of Auchenlochan, and I took a fancy to come back and spend the last night of my holiday with my Auntie. I'm off to Glasgow first thing the morn's morn."

"So!" said the voice. "Queer thing I never saw ye on the Auchenlochan road, where ye can see three mile before ye."

"I left early and took it easy along the shore."

"Did ye so? Well, good-night to ye."

Five minutes later Dickson walked into Mrs. Morran's kitchen, where Heritage was busy making up for a day of short provender.

"I'm for Glasgow to-morrow, Auntie Phemie," he cried. "I want you to loan me a wee trunk with a key, and steek the doors and windows, for I've a lot to tell you."

CHAPTER VI

HOW MR. McCUNN DEPARTED WITH RELIEF AND RETURNED WITH RESOLUTION

AT seven o'clock on the following morning the post-cart, summoned by an early message from Mrs. Morran, appeared outside the cottage. In it sat the ancient postman, whose real home was Auchenlochan, but who slept alternate nights in Dalquharter, and beside him Dobson the innkeeper. Dickson and his hostess stood at the garden-gate, the former with his pack on his back and at his feet a small stout wooden box, of the kind in which cheeses are transported, garnished with an immense padlock. Heritage for obvious reasons did not appear; at the moment he was crouched on the floor of the loft watching the departure through a gap in the dimity curtains.

The traveller, after making sure that Dobson was looking, furtively slipped the key of the trunk into his knapsack.

"Well, good-bye, Auntie Phemie," he said. "I'm sure you've been awful kind to me, and I don't know how to thank you for all you're sending."

"Tuts, Dickson, my man, they're hungry folk about Glesca that'll be glad o' my scones and jeelie. Tell Mirren I'm rale pleased wi' her man and haste ye back soon."

The trunk was deposited on the floor of the cart and Dickson clambered into the back seat. He was thankful that he had not to sit next to Dobson, for he had tell-tale stuff on his person. The morning was wet, so he wore his waterproof, which concealed his odd tendency to stoutness about the middle.

Mrs. Morran played her part well, with all the becoming gravity of an affectionate aunt, but so soon as the post-cart turned the bend of the road her demeanour changed. She was torn with convulsions of silent laughter. She retreated to the kitchen, sank into a chair, wrapped her face in her apron and rocked. Heritage, descending, found her struggling to regain composure. "D'ye ken his wife's name?" she gasped. "I ca'ed her Mirren! And maybe the body's no mairried! Hech sirs! Hech sirs!"

Meantime Dickson was bumping along the moor-road on the back of the post-cart. He had worked out a plan, just as he had been used aforetime to devise a deal in foodstuffs. He had expected one of the watchers to turn up, and was rather relieved that it should be Dobson, whom he regarded as "the most natural beast" of the three. Somehow he did not think that he would be molested before he reached the station, since his enemies would still be undecided in their minds. Probably they only wanted to make sure that he had really departed to forget all about him. But if not, he had his plan ready.

"Are you travelling to-day?" he asked the inn-keeper.

"Just as far as the station to see about some oil-cake I'm expectin'. What's in your wee kist? Ye came here wi' nothing but the bag on your back."

"Ay, the kist is no' mine. It's my auntie's. She's a kind body, and nothing would serve but she must pack a box for me to take back. Let me see. There's a baking of scones; three pots of honey and one of rhubarb jam—she was aye famous for her rhubarb jam; a mutton ham, which you can't get for love or money in Glasgow; some home-made black puddings and a wee skim-milk cheese. I doubt I'll have to take a cab from the station."

Dobson appeared satisfied, lit a short pipe and relapsed into meditation. The long uphill road, ever climbing to where far off showed the tiny white-washed buildings which were the railway station, seemed interminable this morning. The aged postman addressed strange objurgations to his aged horse and muttered reflections to himself, the inn-keeper smoked, and Dickson stared back into the misty hollow where lay Dalquharter. The south-west wind had brought up a screen of rain clouds and washed all the countryside in a soft wet grey. But the eye could still travel a fair distance, and Dickson thought he had a glimpse of a figure on a bicycle leaving the village two miles back. He wondered who it could be. Not Heritage, who had no bicycle. Perhaps some woman who was conspicuously late for the train. Women were the chief cyclists nowadays in country places.

Then he forgot about the bicycle and twisted his neck to watch the station. It was less than a mile

off now, and they had no time to spare, for away to the south among the hummocks of the bog he saw the smoke of the train coming from Auchenlochan. The postman also saw it and whipped up his beast into a clumsy canter. Dickson, always nervous about being late for trains, forced his eyes away and regarded again the road behind them. Suddenly the cyclist had become quite plain—a little more than a mile behind—a man, and pedalling furiously in spite of the stiff ascent. . . . It could only be one person—Léon. He must have discovered their visit to the House yesterday and be on the way to warn Dobson. If he reached the station before the train, there would be no journey to Glasgow that day for one respectable citizen.

Dickson was in a fever of impatience and fright. He dared not abjure the postman to hurry, lest Dobson should turn his head and descry his colleague. But that ancient man had begun to realise the shortness of time and was urging the cart along at a fair pace, since they were now on the flatter shelf of land which carried the railway. Dickson kept his eyes fixed on the bicycle and his teeth shut tight on his lower lip. Now it was hidden by the last dip of hill; now it emerged into view not a quarter of a mile behind, and its rider gave vent to a shrill call. Luckily the innkeeper did not hear, for at that moment with a jolt the cart pulled up at the station door, accompanied by the roar of the incoming train.

Dickson whipped down from the back seat and seized the solitary porter. "Label the box for

Glasgow and into the van with it. Quick, man, and there'll be a shilling for you." He had been doing some rapid thinking these last minutes and had made up his mind. If Dobson and he were alone in a carriage he could not have the box there; that must be elsewhere, so that Dobson could not examine it if he were set on violence, somewhere in which it could still be a focus of suspicion and attract attention from his person. He took his ticket, and rushed on to the platform, to find the porter and the box at the door of the guard's van. Dobson was not there. With the vigour of a fussy traveller he shouted directions to the guard to take good care of his luggage, hurled a shilling at the porter and ran for a carriage. At that moment he became aware of Dobson hurrying through the entrance. He must have met Léon and heard news from him, for his face was red and his ugly brows darkening.

The train was in motion. "Here, you!" Dobson's voice shouted. "Stop! I want a word wi' ye." Dickson plunged at a third-class carriage, for he saw faces behind the misty panes, and above all things then he feared an empty compartment. He clambered on to the step, but the handle would not turn, and with a sharp pang of fear he felt the inn-keeper's grip on his arm. Then some Samaritan from within let down the window, opened the door and pulled him up. He fell on a seat and a second later Dobson staggered in beside him.

Thank Heaven, the dirty little carriage was nearly full. There were two herds, each with a dog and a long hazel crook, and an elderly woman who

looked like a ploughman's wife out for a day's marketing. And there was one other whom Dickson recognised with a peculiar joy—the bagman in the provision line of business whom he had met three days before at Kilchrist.

The recognition was mutual. "Mr. McCunn!" the bagman exclaimed. "My, but that was running it fine! I hope you've had a pleasant holiday, sir?"

"Very pleasant. I've been spending two nights with friends down hereaways. I've been very fortunate in the weather, for it has broke just when I'm leaving."

Dickson sank back on the hard cushions. It had been a near thing, but so far he had won. He wished his heart did not beat so fast, and he hoped he did not betray his disorder in his face. Very deliberately he hunted for his pipe and filled it slowly. Then he turned to Dobson. "I didn't know you were travelling the day. What about your oil-cake?"

"I've changed my mind," was the gruff answer.

"Was that you I heard crying on me, when we were running for the train?"

"Ay. I thought ye had forgot about your kist."

"No fear," said Dickson. "I'm no' likely to forget my auntie's scones."

He laughed pleasantly and then turned to the bagman. Thereafter the compartment hummed with the technicalities of the grocery trade. He exerted himself to draw out his companion, to have him refer to the great firm of D. McCunn, so that the innkeeper might be ashamed of his suspicions.

What nonsense to imagine that a noted and wealthy Glasgow merchant—the bagman's tone was almost reverential—would concern himself with the affairs of a forgotten village and a tumbledown house!

Presently the train drew up at Kirkmichael station. The woman descended, and Dobson, after making sure that no one else meant to follow her example, also left the carriage. A porter was shouting: "Fast train to Glasgow—Glasgow next stop." Dickson watched the innkeeper shoulder his way through the crowd in the direction of the booking office. "He's off to send a telegram," he decided. "There'll be trouble waiting for me at the other end."

When the train moved on he found himself disinclined for further talk. He had suddenly become meditative, and curled up in a corner with his head hard against the window pane, watching the wet fields and glistening roads as they slipped past. He had his plans made for his conduct at Glasgow, but Lord! how he loathed the whole business! Last night he had had a kind of gusto in his desire to circumvent villainy; at Dalquharter station he had enjoyed a momentary sense of triumph; now he felt very small, lonely and forlorn. Only one thought far at the back of his mind cropped up now and then to give him comfort. He was entering on the last lap. Once get this detestable errand done and he would be a free man, free to go back to the kindly humdrum life from which he should never have strayed. Never again, he vowed, never again. Rather would he spend the rest of his days in hydro-

pathics than come within the pale of such horrible adventures. Romance, forsooth! This was not the mild goddess he had sought, but an awful harpy who battened on the souls of men.

He had some bad minutes as the train passed through the suburbs, and along the grimy embankment by which the southern lines enter the city. But as it rumbled over the river bridge and slowed down before the terminus, his vitality suddenly revived. He was a business man, and there was now something for him to do.

After a rapid farewell to the bagman, he found a porter and hustled his box out of the van in the direction of the left-luggage office. Spies, summoned by Dobson's telegram, were, he was convinced, watching his every movement, and he meant to see that they missed nothing. He received his ticket for the box, and slowly and ostentatiously stowed it away in his pack. Swinging the said pack on his arm he sauntered through the entrance hall to the row of waiting taxi-cabs, and selected that one which seemed to him to have the oldest and most doddering driver. He deposited the pack inside on the seat, and then stood still as if struck with a sudden thought.

"I breakfasted terrible early," he told the driver. "I think I'll have a bite to eat. Will you wait?"

"Ay," said the man, who was reading a grubby sheet of newspaper. "I'll wait as long as ye like, for it's you that pays."

Dickson left his pack in the cab and, oddly enough for a careful man, he did not shut the door.

He re-entered the station, strolled to the bookstall and bought a *Glasgow Herald*. His steps then tended to the refreshment room, where he ordered a cup of coffee and two Bath buns, and seated himself at a small table. There he was soon immersed in the financial news, and though he sipped his coffee he left the buns untasted. He took out a penknife and cut various extracts from the *Herald*, bestowing them carefully in his pocket. An observer would have seen an elderly gentleman absorbed in market quotations.

After a quarter of an hour had been spent in this performance he happened to glance at the clock and rose with an exclamation. He hustled out to his taxi and found the driver still intent upon his reading. "Here I am at last," he said cheerily, and had a foot on the step, when he stopped suddenly with a cry. It was a cry of alarm, but also of satisfaction.

"What's become of my pack? I left it on the seat, and now it's gone! There's been a thief here."

The driver, roused from his lethargy, protested in the name of his gods that no one had been near it. "Ye took it into the station wi' ye," he urged.

"I did nothing of the kind. Just you wait here till I see the inspector. A bonny watch *you* keep on a gentleman's things."

But Dickson did not interview the railway authorities. Instead he hurried to the left-luggage office. "I deposited a small box here a short time ago. I mind the number. Is it there still?"

The attendant glanced at a shelf. "A wee deal

box with iron bands. It was took out ten minutes syne. A man brought the ticket and took it away on his shoulder."

"Thank you. There's been a mistake, but the blame's mine. My man mistook my orders."

Then he returned to the now nervous taxi-driver. "I've taken it up with the station-master and he's putting the police on. You'll likely be wanted, so I gave him your number. It's a fair disgrace that there should be so many thieves about this station. It's not the first time I've lost things. Drive me to West George Street and look sharp." And he slammed the door with the violence of an angry man.

But his reflections were not violent, for he smiled to himself. "That was pretty neat. They'll take some time to get the kist open, for I dropped the key out of the train after we left Kirkmichael. That gives me a fair start. If I hadn't thought of that, they'd have found some way to grip me and ripe me long before I got to the Bank." He shuddered as he thought of the dangers he had escaped. "As it is, they're off the track for half an hour at least, while they're rummaging among Auntie Phemie's scones." At the thought he laughed heartily, and when he brought the taxi-cab to a standstill by rapping on the front window, he left it with a temper apparently restored. Obviously he had no grudge against the driver, who to his immense surprise was rewarded with ten shillings.

Three minutes later Mr. McCunn might have been seen entering the head office of the Strathclyde

Bank, and inquiring for the manager. There was no hesitation about him now, for his foot was on his native heath. The chief cashier received him with deference, in spite of his unorthodox garb, for he was not the least honoured of the bank's customers. As it chanced he had been talking about him that very morning to a gentleman from London. "The strength of this city," he had said, tapping his eyeglasses on his knuckles, "does not lie in its dozen very rich men, but in the hundred or two homely folk who make no parade of wealth. Men like Dickson McCunn, for example, who live all their life in a semi-detached villa and die worth half a million." And the Londoner had cordially assented.

So Dickson was ushered promptly into an inner room, and was warmly greeted by Mr. Mackintosh, the patron of the Gorbals Die-Hards.

"I must thank you for your generous donation, McCunn. Those boys will get a little fresh air and quiet after the smoke and din of Glasgow. A little country peace to smooth out the creases in their poor little souls."

"Maybe," said Dickson, with a vivid recollection of Dougal as he had last seen him. Somehow he did not think that peace was likely to be the portion of that devoted band. "But I've not come here to speak about that."

He took off his waterproof; then his coat and waistcoat; and showed himself a strange figure with sundry bulges about the middle. The manager's eyes grew very round. Presently these excrescences

were revealed as linen bags sewn on to his shirt, and fitting into the hollow between ribs and hip. With some difficulty he slit the bags and extracted three hide-bound packages.

"See here, Mackintosh," he said solemnly. "I hand you over these parcels, and you're to put them in the innermost corner of your strong room. You needn't open them. Just put them away as they are, and write me a receipt for them. Write it now."

Mr. Mackintosh obediently took pen in hand.

"What'll I call them?" he asked.

"Just the three leather parcels handed to you by Dickson McCunn, Esq., naming the date."

Mr. Mackintosh wrote. He signed his name with his usual flourish and handed the slip to his client.

"Now," said Dickson, "you'll put that receipt in the strong box where you keep my securities, and you'll give it up to nobody but me in person, and you'll surrender the parcels only on presentation of the receipt. D'you understand?"

"Perfectly. May I ask any questions?"

"You'd better not if you don't want to hear lees."

"What's in the packages?" Mr. Mackintosh weighed them in his hand.

"That's asking," said Dickson. "But I'll tell ye this much. It's jools."

"Your own?"

"No, but I'm their trustee."

"Valuable?"

"I was hearing they were worth more than a million pounds."

"God bless my soul," said the startled manager. "I don't like this kind of business, McCunn."

"No more do I. But you'll do it to oblige an old friend and a good customer. If you don't know much about the packages you know all about me. Now, mind, I trust you."

Mr. Mackintosh forced himself to a joke. "Did you maybe steal them?"

Dickson grinned. "Just what I did. And that being so, I want you to let me out by the back door."

When he found himself in the street he felt the huge relief of a boy who had emerged with credit from the dentist's chair. Remembering that there would be no midday dinner for him at home, his first step was to feed heavily at a restaurant. He had, so far as he could see, surmounted all his troubles, his one regret being that he had lost his pack, which contained among other things his *Izaak Walton* and his safety razor. He bought another razor and a new Walton, and mounted an electric tram-car *en route* for home.

Very contented with himself he felt as the car swung across the Clyde bridge. He had done well—but of that he did not want to think, for the whole beastly thing was over. He was going to bury that memory, to be resurrected perhaps on a later day when the unpleasantness had been forgotten. Heritage had his address, and knew where to come when it was time to claim the jewels. As for the watchers, they must have ceased to suspect him, when they discovered the innocent contents of his knapsack and Mrs. Morran's box. Home for him, and a

luxurious tea by his own fireside; and then an evening with his books, for Heritage's nonsense had stimulated his literary fervour. He would dip into his old favourites again to confirm his faith. Tomorrow he would go for a jaunt somewhere—perhaps down the Clyde, or to the South of England, which he had heard was a pleasant, thickly peopled country. No more lonely inns and deserted villages for him; henceforth he would make certain of comfort and peace.

The rain had stopped, and, as the car moved down the dreary vista of Eglinton Street, the sky opened into fields of blue and the April sun silvered the puddles. It was in such place and under such weather that Dickson suffered an overwhelming experience.

It is beyond my skill, being all unlearned in the game of psycho-analysis, to explain how this thing happened. I concern myself only with facts. Suddenly the pretty veil of self-satisfaction was rent from top to bottom, and Dickson saw a figure of himself within, a smug leaden little figure which simpered and preened itself and was hollow as a rotten nut. And he hated it.

The horrid truth burst on him that Heritage had been right. He only played with life. That imbecile image was a mere spectator, content to applaud, but shrinking from the contact of reality. It had been all right as a provision merchant, but when it fancied itself capable of higher things it had deceived itself. Foolish little image with its brave dreams and its swelling words from Browning! All

make-believe of the feeblest. He was a coward, running away at the first threat of danger. It was as if he were watching a tall stranger with a wand pointing to the embarrassed phantom that was himself, and ruthlessly exposing its frailties! And yet the pitiless showman was himself too—himself as he wanted to be, cheerful, brave, resourceful, indomitable.

Dickson suffered a spasm of mortal agony. "Oh, I'm surely not so bad as all that," he groaned. But the hurt was not only in his pride. He saw himself being forced to new decisions, and each alternative was of the blackest. He fairly shivered with the horror of it. The car slipped past a suburban station from which passengers were emerging—comfortable black-coated men such as he had once been. He was bitterly angry with Providence for picking him out of the great crowd of sedentary folk for this sore ordeal. "Why was I tethered to such a conscience?" was his moan. But there was that stern inquisitor with his pointer exploring his soul. "You flatter yourself you have done your share," he was saying. "You will make pretty stories about it to yourself, and some day you may tell your friends, modestly disclaiming any special credit. But you will be a liar, for you know you are afraid. You are running away when the work is scarcely begun, and leaving it to a few boys and a poet whom you had the impudence the other day to despise. I think you are worse than a coward. I think you are a cad."

His fellow-passengers on the top of the car saw

an absorbed middle-aged gentleman who seemed to have something the matter with his bronchial tubes. They could not guess at the tortured soul. The decision was coming nearer, the alternatives loomed up dark and inevitable. On one side was submission to ignominy, on the other a return to that place, which he detested, and yet loathed himself for detesting. "It seems I'm not likely to have much peace either way," he reflected dismally.

How the conflict would have ended had it continued on these lines I cannot say. The soul of Mr. McCunn was being assailed by moral and metaphysical adversaries with which he had not been trained to deal. But suddenly it leapt from negatives to positives. He saw the face of the girl in the shuttered House, so fair and young and yet so haggard. It seemed to be appealing to him to rescue it from a great loneliness and fear. Yes, he had been right, it had a strange look of his Janet—the wide-open eyes, the solemn mouth. What was to become of that child if he failed her in her great need?

Now Dickson was a practical man and this view of the case brought him into a world which he understood. "It's fair ridiculous," he reflected. "Nobody there to take a grip of things. Just a wheen Gorbals keelies and the lad Heritage. Not a business man among the lot."

The alternatives, which hove before him like two great banks of cloud, were altering their appearance. One was becoming faint and tenuous; the other, solid as ever, was just a shade less black.

He lifted his eyes and saw in the near distance the corner of the road which led to his home. "I must decide before I reach that corner," he told himself.

Then his mind became apathetic. He began to whistle dismally through his teeth, watching the corner as it came nearer. The car stopped with a jerk. "I'll go back," he said aloud, clambering down the steps. The truth was he had decided five minutes before when he first saw Janet's face.

He walked briskly to his house, entirely refusing to waste any more energy on reflection. "This is a business proposition," he told himself, "and I'm going to handle it as such." Tibby was surprised to see him and offered him tea in vain. "I'm just back for a few minutes. Let's see the letters."

There was one from his wife. She proposed to stay another week at the Neuk Hydropathic and suggested that he might join her and bring her home. He sat down and wrote a long affectionate reply, declining, but expressing his delight that she was soon returning. "That's very likely the last time Mamma will hear from me," he reflected, but—oddly enough—without any great fluttering of the heart.

Then he proceeded to be furiously busy. He sent out Tibby to buy another knapsack and to order a cab and to cash a considerable cheque. In the knapsack he packed a fresh change of clothing and the new safety razor, but no books, for he was past the need of them. That done, he drove to his solicitors.

"What like a firm are Glendonan and Speirs in Edinburgh?" he asked the senior partner.

"Oh, very respectable. Very respectable indeed. Regular Edinburgh W.S. lot. Do a lot of factoring."

"I want you to telephone through to them and inquire about a place in Carrick called Huntingtower, near the village of Dalquharter. I understand it's to let, and I'm thinking of taking a lease of it."

The senior partner after some delay got through to Edinburgh, and was presently engaged in the feverish dialectic which the long-distance telephone involves. "I want to speak to Mr. Glendonan himself. . . . Yes, yes, Mr. Caw of Paton and Linklater. . . . Good afternoon . . . Huntingtower. Yes, in Carrick. Not to let? But I understand it's been in the market for some months. You say you've an idea it has just been let. But my client is positive that you're mistaken, unless the agreement was made this morning. . . . You'll inquire? Oh, I see. The actual factoring is done by your local agent. Mr. James Loudon, in Auchenlochan. You think my client had better get into touch with him at once. Just wait a minute, please."

He put his hand over the receiver. "Usual Edinburgh way of doing business," he observed caustically. "What do you want done?"

"I'll run down and see this Loudon. Tell Glendonan and Speirs to advise him to expect me, for I'll go this very day."

Mr. Caw resumed his conversation. "My client

would like a telegram sent at once to Mr. Loudon introducing him. He's Mr. Dickson McCunn of Mearns Street—the great provision merchant, you know. Oh, yes! Good for any rent. Refer if you like to the Strathclyde Bank, but you can take my word for it. Thank you. Then that's settled. Good-bye."

Dickson's next visit was to a gunmaker who was a fellow-elder with him in the Guthrie Memorial Kirk.

"I want a pistol and a lot of cartridges," he announced. "I'm not caring what kind it is, so long as it is a good one and not too big."

"For yourself?" the gunmaker asked. "You must have a licence, I doubt, and there's a lot of new regulations."

"I can't wait on a licence. It's for a cousin of mine who's off to Mexico at once. You've got to find some way of obliging an old friend, Mr. McNair."

Mr. McNair scratched his head. "I don't see how I can sell you one. But I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll lend you one. It belongs to my nephew, Peter Tait, and has been lying in a drawer ever since he came back from the front. He has no use for it now that he's a placed minister."

So Dickson bestowed in the pockets of his waterproof a service revolver and fifty cartridges, and bade his cab take him to the shop in Mearns Street. For a moment the sight of the familiar place struck a pang to his breast, but he choked down unavailing regrets. He ordered a great hamper of foodstuffs

—the most delicate kind of tinned goods, two perfect hams, tongues, Strassburg pies, chocolate, cakes, biscuits and, as a last thought, half a dozen bottles of old liqueur brandy. It was to be carefully packed, addressed to Mrs. Morran, Dalquharter Station, and delivered in time for him to take down by the 7.33 train. Then he drove to the terminus and dined with something like a desperate peace in his heart.

On this occasion he took a first-class ticket, for he wanted to be alone. As the lights began to be lit in the wayside stations and the clear April dusk darkened into night, his thoughts were sombre yet resigned. He opened the window and let the sharp air of the Renfrewshire uplands fill the carriage. It was fine weather again after the rain, and a bright constellation—perhaps Dougal's friend O'Brien—hung in the western sky. How happy he would have been a week ago had he been starting thus for a country holiday! He could sniff the faint scent of moor-burn and ploughed earth which had always been his first reminder of spring. But he had been pitchforked out of that old happy world and could never enter it again. Alas! for the roadside fire, the cosy inn, the *Compleat Angler*, the Chavender or Chub!

And yet—and yet! He had done the right thing, though the Lord alone knew how it would end. He began to pluck courage from his very melancholy and hope from his reflections upon the transitoriness of life. He was austere following Romance as he conceived it, and if that capricious lady

had taken one dream from him she might yet reward him with a better. Tags of poetry came into his head which seemed to favour this philosophy—particularly some lines of Browning on which he used to discourse to his Kirk Literary Society. Uncommon silly, he considered, these homilies of his must have been, mere twitterings of the unfledged. But now he saw more in the lines, a deeper interpretation which he had earned the right to make.

“Oh, world, where all things change and nought abides,
Oh, life, the long mutation—is it so?
Is it with life as with the body’s change?—
Where, e’en the’ better follow, good must pass.”

That was as far as he could get, though he cudgelled his memory to continue. Moralising thus, he became drowsy, and was almost asleep when the train drew up at the station of Kirkmichael.

CHAPTER VII

SUNDRY DOINGS IN THE MIRK

FROM Kirkmichael on the train stopped at every station, but no passenger seemed to leave or arrive at the little platforms white in the moon. At Dalquharter the case of provisions was safely transferred to the porter with instructions to take charge of it till it was sent for. During the next ten minutes Dickson's mind began to work upon his problem with a certain briskness. It was all nonsense that the law of Scotland could not be summoned to the defence. The jewels had been safely got rid of, and who was to dispute their possession? Not Dobson and his crew, who had no sort of title, and were out for naked robbery. The girl had spoken of greater dangers from new enemies—kidnapping perhaps. Well, that was felony, and the police must be brought in. Probably if all were known the three watchers had criminal records, pages long, filed at Scotland Yard. The man to deal with that side of the business was Loudon the factor, and to him he was bound in the first place. He had made a clear picture in his head of this Loudon—a derelict old country writer, formal, pedantic, lazy, anxious only to get an unprofitable business off his hands with the least possible trouble, never going near the place himself, and ably supported in his

lethargy by conceited Edinburgh Writers to the Signet. "Sich notions of business!" he murmured. "I wonder that there's a single county family in Scotland no' in the bankruptcy court!" It was his mission to wake up Mr. James Loudon.

Arrived at Auchenlochan he went first to the Salutation Hotel, a pretentious place sacred to golfers. There he engaged a bedroom for the night and, having certain scruples, paid for it in advance. He also had some sandwiches prepared which he stowed in his pack, and filled his flask with whisky. "I'm going home to Glasgow by the first train to-morrow," he told the landlady, "and now I've got to see a friend. I'll not be back till late." He was assured that there would be no difficulty about his admittance at any hour, and directed how to find Mr. Loudon's dwelling.

It was an old house fronting direct on the street, with a fanlight above the door and a neat brass plate bearing the legend "Mr. James Loudon, Writer." A lane ran up one side leading apparently to a garden, for the moonlight showed the dusk of trees. In front was the main street of Auchenlochan, now deserted save for a single roysterer, and opposite stood the ancient town house, with arches where the country folk came at the spring and autumn hiring fairs. Dickson rang the antiquated bell, and was presently admitted to a dark hall floored with oil-cloth, where a single gas-jet showed that on one side was the business office and on the other the living-rooms. Mr. Loudon was at supper, he was told, and he sent in

his card. Almost at once the door at the end on the left side was flung open and a large figure appeared flourishing a napkin. "Come in, sir, come in," it cried. "I've just finished a bite of meat. Very glad to see you. Here, Maggie, what d'you mean by keeping the gentleman standing in that outer darkness?"

The room into which Dickson was ushered was small and bright, with a red paper on the walls, a fire burning and a big oil lamp in the centre of a table. Clearly Mr. Loudon had no wife, for it was a bachelor's den in every line of it. A cloth was laid on a corner of the table, on which stood the remnants of a meal. Mr. Loudon seemed to have been about to make a brew of punch, for a kettle simmered by the fire, and lemons and sugar flanked a pot-bellied whisky decanter of the type that used to be known as a "mason's mell."

The sight of the lawyer was a surprise to Dickson and dissipated his notions of an aged and lethargic incompetent. Mr. Loudon was a strongly built man who could not be a year over fifty. He had a ruddy face, clean-shaven except for a grizzled moustache; his grizzled hair was thinning round the temples; but his skin was unwrinkled and his eyes had all the vigour of youth. His tweed suit was well cut, and the buff waistcoat with flaps and pockets and the plain leather watchguard hinted at the sportsman, as did the half-dozen racing prints on the wall. A pleasant high-coloured figure he made; his voice had the frank ring due to much use out of doors; and his expression had the singular

candour which comes from grey eyes with large pupils and a narrow iris.

"Sit down, Mr. McCunn. Take the arm-chair by the fire. I've had a wire from Glendonan and Speirs about you. I was just going to have a glass of toddy—a grand thing for these uncertain April nights. You'll join me? No? Well, you'll smoke anyway. There's cigars at your elbow. Certainly, a pipe if you like. This is Liberty Hall."

Dickson found some difficulty in the part for which he had cast himself. He had expected to condescend upon an elderly inept and give him sharp instructions; instead he found himself faced with a jovial, virile figure which certainly did not suggest incompetence. It has been mentioned already that he had always great difficulty in looking any one in the face, and this difficulty was intensified when he found himself confronted with bold and candid eyes. He felt abashed and a little nervous.

"I've come to see you about Huntingtower House," he began.

"I know. So Glendonans informed me. Well, I'm very glad to hear it. The place has been standing empty far too long, and that is worse for a new house than an old house. There's not much money to spend on it either, unless we can make sure of a good tenant. How did you hear about it?"

"I was taking a bit holiday and I spent a night at Dalquharter with an old auntie of mine. You must understand I've just retired from business, and I'm thinking of finding a country place. I used to have the big provision shop in Mearns

Street—now the United Supply Stores, Limited. You've maybe heard of it?"

The other bowed and smiled. "Who hasn't? The name of Dickson McCunn is known far beyond the city of Glasgow."

Dickson was not insensible of the flattery, and he continued with more freedom. "I took a walk and got a glisk of the House and I liked the look of it. You see, I want a quiet bit a good long way from a town, and at the same time a house with all modern conveniences. I suppose Huntingtower has that?"

"When it was built fifteen years ago it was considered a model—six bathrooms, its own electric light plant, steam heating, an independent boiler for hot water, the whole bag of tricks. I won't say but what some of these contrivances will want looking to, for the place has been some time empty, but there can be nothing very far wrong, and I can guarantee that the bones of the house are good."

"Well, that's all right," said Dickson. "I don't mind spending a little money myself if the place suits me. But of that, of course, I'm not yet certain, for I've only had a glimpse of the outside. I wanted to get into the policies, but a man at the lodge wouldn't let me. They're a mighty uncivil lot down there"

"I'm very sorry to hear that," said Mr. Loudon in a tone of concern.

"Ay, and if I take the place I'll stipulate that you get rid of the lodgekeepers."

"There won't be the slightest difficulty about

that, for they are only weekly tenants. But I'm vexed to hear they were uncivil. I was glad to get any tenant that offered, and they were well recommended to me."

"They're foreigners."

"One of them is—a Belgian refugee that Lady Morewood took an interest in. But the other—Spittal, they call him—I thought he was Scotch."

"He's not that. And I don't like the innkeeper either. I would want him shifted."

Mr. Loudon laughed. "I dare say Dobson is a rough diamond. There's worse folk in the world all the same, but I don't think he will want to stay. He only went there to pass the time till he heard from his brother in Vancouver. He's a roving spirit, and will be off overseas again."

"That's all right!" said Dickson, who was beginning to have horrid suspicions that he might be on a wild-goose chase after all. "Well, the next thing is for me to see over the House."

"Certainly. I'd like to go with you myself. What day would suit you? Let me see. This is Friday. What about this day week?"

"I was thinking of to-morrow. Since I'm down in these parts I may as well get the job done."

Mr. Loudon looked puzzled. "I quite see that. But I don't think it's possible. You see, I have to consult the owners and get their consent to a lease. Of course they have the general purpose of letting, but—well, they're queer folk the Kennedys," and his face wore the half-embarrassed smile of an honest man preparing to make confidences. "When

poor Mr. Quentin died, the place went to his two sisters in joint ownership. A very bad arrangement, as you can imagine. It isn't entailed, and I've always been pressing them to sell, but so far they won't hear of it. They both married Englishmen, so it will take a day or two to get in touch with them. One, Mrs. Stukely, lives in Devonshire. The other—Miss Katie that was—married Sir Francis Morewood, the general, and I hear that she's expected back in London next Monday from the Riviera. I'll wire and write first thing to-morrow morning. But you must give me a day or two."

Dickson felt himself waking up. His doubts about his own sanity were dissolving, for, as his mind reasoned, the factor was prepared to do anything he asked—but only after a week had gone. What he was concerned with was the next few days.

"All the same I would like to have a look at the place to-morrow, even if nothing comes of it."

Mr. Loudon looked seriously perplexed. "You will think me absurdly fussy, Mr. McCunn, but I must really beg of you to give up the idea. The Kennedys, as I have said, are—well, not exactly like other people, and I have the strictest orders not to let any one visit the house without their express leave. It sounds a ridiculous rule, but I assure you it's as much as my job is worth to disregard it."

"D'you mean to say not a soul is allowed inside the House?"

"Not a soul."

"Well, Mr. Loudon, I'm going to tell you a queer thing, which I think you ought to know. When I was taking a walk the other night—your Belgian wouldn't let me into the policies, but I went down the glen—what's that they call it? the Garple Dean—I got round the back where the old ruin stands and I had a good look at the House. I tell you there was somebody in it."

"It would be Spittal, who acts as caretaker."

"It was not. It was a woman. I saw her on the verandah."

The candid grey eyes were looking straight at Dickson, who managed to bring his own shy orbs to meet them. He thought that he detected a shade of hesitation. Then Mr. Loudon got up from his chair and stood on the hearthrug looking down at his visitor. He laughed, with some embarrassment, but ever so pleasantly.

"I really don't know what you will think of me, Mr. McCunn. Here are you, coming to do us all a kindness, and lease that infernal white elephant, and here have I been steadily hoaxing you for the last five minutes. I humbly ask your pardon. Set it down to the loyalty of an old family lawyer. Now, I am going to tell you the truth and take you into our confidence, for I know we are safe with you. The Kennedys are—always have been—just a wee bit queer. Old inbred stock, you know. They will produce somebody like poor Mr. Quentin, who was as sane as you or me, but as a rule in every generation there is one member of the family—or more—who is just a little bit——" and he tapped

his forehead. "Nothing violent, you understand, but just not quite 'wise and world-like,' as the old folk say. Well, there's a certain old lady, an aunt of Mr. Quentin and his sisters, who has always been about tenpence in the shilling. Usually she lives at Bournemouth, but one of her crazes is a passion for Huntingtower, and the Kennedys have always humoured her and had her to stay every spring. When the House was shut up that became impossible, but this year she took such a craving to come back, that Lady Morewood asked me to arrange it. It had to be kept very quiet, but the poor old thing is perfectly harmless, and just sits and knits with her maid and looks out of the seaward windows. Now you see why I can't take you there to-morrow. I have to get rid of the old lady, who in any case was travelling south early next week. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Dickson with some fervour. He had learned exactly what he wanted. The factor was telling him lies. Now he knew where to place Mr. Loudon.

He always looked back upon what followed as a very creditable piece of play-acting for a man who had small experience in that line.

"Is the old lady a wee wizened body, with a black cap and something like a white cashmere shawl round her shoulders?"

"You describe her exactly," Mr. Loudon replied eagerly.

"That would explain the foreigners."

"Of course. We couldn't have natives who

would make the thing the clash of the countryside."

"Of course not. But it must be a difficult job to keep a business like that quiet. Any wandering policeman might start inquiries. And supposing the lady became violent?"

"Oh, there's no fear of that. Besides, I've a position in this county—Deputy Fiscal and so forth—and a friend of the Chief Constable. I think I may be trusted to do a little private explaining if the need arose."

"I see," said Dickson. He saw, indeed, a great deal which would give him food for furious thought. "Well, I must just possess my soul in patience. Here's my Glasgow address, and I look to you to send me a telegram whenever you're ready for me. I'm at the Salutation to-night, and go home to-morrow with the first train. Wait a minute"—and he pulled out his watch—"there's a train stops at Auchenlochan at 10.17. I think I'll catch that. . . . Well, Mr. Loudon, I'm very much obliged to you, and I'm glad to think that it'll no be long till we renew our acquaintance."

The factor accompanied him to the door, diffusing geniality. "Very pleased indeed to have met you. A pleasant journey and a quick return."

The street was still empty. Into a corner of the arches opposite the moon was shining, and Dickson retired thither to consult his map of the neighbourhood. He found what he wanted and, as he lifted his eyes, caught sight of a man coming down the causeway. Promptly he retired into the shadow

and watched the new-comer. There could be no mistake about the figure; the bulk, the walk, the carriage of the head marked it for Dobson. The inn-keeper went slowly past the factor's house; then halted and retraced his steps; then, making sure that the street was empty, turned into the side lane which led to the garden.

This was what sailors call a cross-bearing, and strengthened Dickson's conviction. He delayed no longer, but hurried down the side street by which the north road leaves the town.

He had crossed the bridge of Lochan and was climbing the steep ascent which led to the heathy plateau separating that stream from the Garple before he had got his mind quite clear on the case. *First*, Loudon was in the plot, whatever it was; responsible for the details of the girl's imprisonment, but not the main author. That must be the Unknown who was still to come, from whom Spidel took his orders. Dobson was probably Loudon's special henchman, working directly under him. *Secondly*, the immediate object had been the jewels, and they were happily safe in the vaults of the incorruptible Mackintosh. But, *third*—and this only on Saskia's evidence—the worst danger to her began with the arrival of the Unknown. What could that be? Probably, kidnapping. He was prepared to believe anything of people like Bolsheviks. And, *fourth*, this danger was due within the next day or two. Loudon had been quite willing to let him into the house and to sack all the watchers within a week from that date. The natural and right thing was

to summon the aid of the law, but, *fifth*, that would be a slow business with Loudon able to put spokes in the wheels and befog the authorities, and the mischief would be done before a single policeman showed his face in Dalquharter. Therefore, *sixth*, he and Heritage must hold the fort in the meantime, and he would send a wire to his lawyer, Mr. Caw, to get to work with the constabulary. *Seventh*, he himself was probably free from suspicion in both Loudon's and Dobson's minds as a harmless fool. But that freedom would not survive his reappearance in Dalquharter. He could say, to be sure, that he had come back to see his auntie, but that would not satisfy the watchers, since, so far as they knew, he was the only man outside the gang who was aware that people were dwelling in the House. They would not tolerate his presence in the neighbourhood.

He formulated his conclusions as if it were an ordinary business deal, and rather to his surprise was not conscious of any fear. As he pulled together the belt of his waterproof he felt the reassuring bulges in its pockets which were his pistol and cartridges. He reflected that it must be very difficult to miss with a pistol if you fired it at, say, three yards, and if there was to be shooting that would be his range. Mr. McCunn had stumbled on the precious truth that the best way to be rid of quaking knees is to keep a busy mind.

He crossed the ridge of the plateau and looked down on the Garple glen. There were the lights of Dalquharter—or rather a single light, for the in-

habitants went early to bed. His intention was to seek quarters with Mrs. Morran, when his eye caught a gleam in a hollow of the moor a little to the east. He knew it for the camp-fire around which Dougal's warriors bivouacked. The notion came to him to go there instead, and hear the news of the day before entering the cottage. So he crossed the bridge, skirted a plantation of firs, and scrambled through the broom and heather in what he took to be the right direction.

The moon had gone down, and the quest was not easy. Dickson had come to the conclusion that he was on the wrong road, when he was summoned by a voice which seemed to arise out of the ground.

"Who goes there?"

"What's that you say?"

"Who goes there?" The point of a pole was held firmly against his chest.

"I'm Mr. McCunn, a friend of Dougal's."

"Stand, friend." The shadow before him whistled and another shadow appeared. "Report to the Chief that there's a man here, name o' McCunn, seekin' for him."

Presently the messenger returned with Dougal and a cheap lantern which he flashed in Dickson's face.

"Oh, it's you," said that leader, who had his jaw bound up as if he had the toothache. "What are ye doing back here?"

"To tell the truth, Dougal," was the answer, "I couldn't stay away. I was fair miserable when I

thought of Mr. Heritage and you laddies left to yourselves. My conscience simply wouldn't let me stop at home, so here I am."

Dougal grunted, but clearly he approved, for from that moment he treated Dickson with a new respect. Formerly when he had referred to him at all it had been as "auld McCunn." Now it was "Mister McCunn." He was given rank as a worthy civilian ally.

The bivouac was a cheerful place in the wet night. A great fire of pine roots and old paling posts hissed in the fine rain, and around it crouched several urchins busy making oatmeal cakes in the embers. On one side a respectable lean-to had been constructed by nailing a plank to two fir-trees, running sloping poles thence to the ground, and thatching the whole with spruce branches and heather. On the other side two small dilapidated home-made tents were pitched. Dougal motioned his companion into the lean-to, where they had some privacy from the rest of the band.

"Well, what's your news?" Dickson asked. He noticed that the Chieftain seemed to have been comprehensively in the wars, for apart from the bandage on his jaw, he had numerous small cuts on his brow, and a great rent in one of his shirt sleeves. Also he appeared to be going lame, and when he spoke a new gap was revealed in his large teeth.

"Things," said Dougal solemnly, "has come to a bonny cripus. This very night we've been in a battle."

He spat fiercely, and the light of war burned in his eyes.

"It was the tinklers from the Garple Dean. They yokit on us about seven o'clock, just at the darkenin'. First they tried to bounce us. We weren't wanted here, they said, so we'd better clear. I telled them that it was them that wasn't wanted. 'Awa' to Finnick,' says I. 'D'ye think we take our orders from dirty ne'er-do-weels like you?' 'By God,' says they, 'we'll cut your lights out,' and then the battle started."

"What happened?" Dickson asked excitedly.

"They were four muckle men against six laddies, and they thought they had an easy job! Little they kenned the Gorbals Die-Hards! I had been expectin' something of the kind, and had made my plans. They first tried to pu' down our tents and burn them. I let them get within five yards, reservin' my fire. The first volley—stones from our hands and our catties—halted them, and before they could recover three of us had got hold o' burnin' sticks frae the fire and were lammin' into them. We kinnled their claes, and they fell back swearin' and stampin' to get the fire out. Then I gave the word and we were on them wi' our poles, usin' the points accordin' to instructions. My orders was to keep a good distance, for if they had grippit one o' us he'd ha' been done for. They were roarin' mad by now, and twae had out their knives, but they couldn't do muckle, for it was gettin' dark, and they didn't ken the ground like us, and were aye trippin' and tumblin'. But they

pressed us hard, and one o' them landed me an awful clype on the jaw. They were still aiming at our tents, and I saw that if they got near the fire again it would be the end o' us. So I blew my whistle for Thomas Yownie, who was in command o' the other half of us, with instructions to fall upon their rear. That brought Thomas up, and the tinklers had to face round about and fight a battle on two fronts. We charged them and they broke, and the last seen o' them they were coolin' their burns in the Garple."

"Well done, man. Had you many casualties?"

"We're a' a wee thing battered, but nothing to hurt. I'm the worst, for one o' them had a grip o' me for about three seconds, and Gosh! he was fierce."

"They're beaten off for the night, anyway?"

"Ay, for the night. But they'll come back, never fear. That's why I said that things had come to a cripus."

"What's the news from the House?"

"A quiet day, and no word o' Lean or Dobson."

Dickson nodded, "They were hunting me."

"Mr. Heritage has gone to bide in the Hoose. They were watchin' the Garple Dean, so I took him round by the Laver foot and up the rocks. He's a grand climber, yon. We fund a road up the rocks and got in by the verandy. Did ye ken that the lassie had a pistol? Well, she has, and it seems that Mr. Heritage is a good shot wi' a pistol, so there's some hope thereaways. . . . Are the jools safe?"

"Safe in the bank. But the jools were not the main thing."

Dougal nodded. "So I was thinkin'. The lassie wasn't muckle the easier for gettin' rid o' them. I didn't just quite understand what she said to Mr. Heritage, for they were aye wanderin' into foreign langwidges, but it seems she's terrible feared o' somebody that may turn up any moment. What's the reason I can't say. She's maybe got a secret, or maybe it's just that she's ower bonny."

"That's the trouble," said Dickson and proceeded to recount his interview with the factor, to which Dougal gave close attention. "Now the way I read the thing is this. There's a plot to kidnap that lady, for some infernal purpose, and it depends on the arrival of some person or persons, and it's due to happen in the next day or two. If we try to work it through the police alone, they'll beat us, for Loudon will manage to hang the business up till it's too late. So we must take up the job ourselves. We must stand a siege, Mr. Heritage and me and you laddies, and for that purpose we'd better all keep together. It won't be extra easy to carry her off from all of us, and if they do manage it we'll stick to their heels. . . . Man, Dougal, isn't it a queer thing that whiles law-abiding folk have to make their own laws? . . . So my plan is that the lot of us get into the House and form a garrison. If you don't, the tinklers will come back and you'll no' beat them in the daylight."

"I doubt no'," said Dougal. "But what about our meat?"

"We must lay in provisions. We'll get what we can from Mrs. Morran, and I've left a big box of fancy things at Dalquharter station. Can you laddies manage to get it down here?"

Dougal reflected. "Ay, we can hire Mrs. Sempill's powny, the same that fetched our kit."

"Well, that's your job to-morrow. See, I'll write you a line to the station-master. And will you undertake to get it some way into the House?"

"There's just the one road open—by the rocks. It'll have to be done. It *can* be done."

"And I've another job. I'm writing this telegram to a friend in Glasgow who will put a spoke in Mr. Loudon's wheel. I want one of you to go to Kirkmichael to send it from the telegraph office there."

Dougal placed the wire to Mr. Caw in his bosom. "What about yourself? We want somebody outside to keep his eyes open. It's bad strawtegy to cut off your communications."

Dickson thought for a moment. "I believe you're right. I believe the best plan for me is to go back to Mrs. Morran's as soon as the old body's like to be awake. You can always get at me there, for it's easy to slip into her back kitchen without anybody in the village seeing you. . . . Yes, I'll do that, and you'll come and report developments to me. And now I'm for a bite and a pipe. It's hungry work travelling the country in the small hours."

"I'm going to introjuice ye to the rest o' us," said Dougal. "Here, men!" he called, and four figures rose from the side of the fire. As Dickson munched

a sandwich he passed in review the whole company of the Gorbals Die-Hards, for the pickets were also brought in, two others taking their places. There was Thomas Yownie, the Chief of Staff, with a wrist wound up in the handkerchief which he had borrowed from his neck. There was a burly lad who wore trousers much too large for him, and who was known as Peer Pairson, a contraction presumably for Peter Paterson. After him came a lean tall boy who answered to the name of Napoleon. There was a midget of a child, desperately sooty in the face either from battle or from fire-tending, who was presented as Wee Jaikie. Last came the picket who had held his pole at Dickson's chest, a sandy-haired warrior with a snub nose and the mouth and jaw of a pug-dog. He was Old Bill, or in Dougal's parlance "Auld Bull."

The Chieftain viewed his scarred following with a grim content. "That's a tough lot for ye, Mr. McCunn. Used a' their days wi' sleepin' in coal-rees and dunnies and dodgin' the polis. Ye'll no beat the Gorbals Die-Hards."

"You're right, Dougal," said Dickson. "There's just the six of you. If there were a dozen, I think this country would be needing some new kind of a government."

CHAPTER VIII

HOW A MIDDLE-AGED CRUSADER ACCEPTED A CHALLENGE

THE first cocks had just begun to crow and the clocks had not yet struck five when Dickson presented himself at Mrs. Morran's back door. That active woman had already been half an hour out of bed, and was drinking her morning cup of tea in the kitchen. She received him with cordiality, nay, with relief.

"Eh, sirs, but I'm glad to see ye back. Guid kens what's gaun on at the Hoose thae days. Mr. Heritage left here yestreen, creepin' round by dyke-sides and berry-busses like a wheasel. It's a mercy to get a responsible man in the place. I aye had a notion ye wad come back, for, thinks I, nevoy Dickson is no the yin to desert folk in trouble. . . . Whaur's my wee kist? . . . Lost, ye say. That's a peety, for it's been my cheese-box thae thirty year."

Dickson ascended to the loft, having announced his need of at least three hours' sleep. As he rolled into bed his mind was curiously at ease. He felt equipped for any call that might be made on him. That Mrs. Morran should welcome him back as a resource in need gave him a new assurance of manhood.

He woke between nine and ten to the sound of rain lashing against the garret window. As he picked his way out of the mazes of sleep and recovered the skein of his immediate past, he found to his disgust that he had lost his composure. All the flock of fears that had left him when, on the top of the Glasgow tram-car, he had made the great decision had flown back again and settled like black crows on his spirit. He was running a horrible risk and all for a whim. What business had he to be mixing himself up in things he did not understand? It might be a huge mistake, and then he would be a laughing stock; for a moment he repented his telegram to Mr. Caw. Then he recanted that suspicion; there could be no mistake, except the fatal one that he had taken on a job too big for him. He sat on the edge of his bed and shivered, with his eyes on the grey drift of rain. He would have felt more stout-hearted had the sun been shining.

He shuffled to the window and looked out. There in the village street was Dobson, and Dobson saw him. That was a bad blunder, for his reason told him that he should have kept his presence in Dalquharter hid as long as possible.

There was a knock at the cottage door, and presently Mrs. Morran appeared.

"It's the man frae the inn," she announced. "He's wantin' a word wi' ye. Speakin' verra ceevil, too."

"Tell him to come up," said Dickson. He might as well get the interview over. Dobson had seen Loudon and must know of their conversation. The

sight of himself back again when he had pretended to be off to Glasgow would remove him effectually from the class of the unsuspected. He wondered just what line Dobson would take.

The innkeeper obtruded his bulk through the low door. His face was wrinkled into a smile, which nevertheless left the small eyes ungenial. His voice had a loud vulgar cordiality. Suddenly Dickson was conscious of a resemblance, a resemblance to somebody whom he had recently seen. It was Loudon. There was the same thrusting of the chin forward, the same odd cheek-bones, the same unctuous heartiness of speech. The innkeeper, well washed and polished and dressed, would be no bad copy of the factor. They must be near kin, perhaps brothers.

"Good morning to you, Mr. McCunn. Man, it's pitifu' weather, and just when the farmers are wanting a dry seed-bed. What brings ye back here? Ye travel the country like a drover."

"Oh, I'm a free man now and I took a fancy to this place. An idle body has nothing to do but please himself."

"I hear ye're taking a lease of Huntingtower?"

"Now who told you that?"

"Just the clash of the place. Is it true?"

Dickson looked sly and a little annoyed.

"I maybe had half a thought of it, but I'll thank you not to repeat the story. It's a big house for a plain man like me, and I haven't properly inspected it."

"Oh, I'll keep mum, never fear. But if ye've

that sort of notion, I can understand you not being able to keep away from the place."

"That's maybe the fact," Dickson admitted.

"Well! It's just on that point I want a word with you." The innkeeper seated himself unbidden on the chair which held Dickson's modest raiment. He leaned forward and with a coarse forefinger tapped Dickson's pyjama-clad knees. "I can't have ye wandering about the place. I'm very sorry, but I've got my orders from Mr. Loudon. So if you think that by bidin' here ye can see more of the House and the policies, ye're wrong, Mr. McCunn. It can't be allowed, for we're no' ready for ye yet. D'ye understand? That's Mr. Loudon's orders. . . . Now, would it not be a far better plan if ye went back to Glasgow and came back in a week's time? I'm thinking of your own comfort, Mr. McCunn."

Dickson was cogitating hard. This man was clearly instructed to get rid of him at all costs for the next few days. The neighbourhood had to be cleared for some black business. The tinklers had been deputed to drive out the Gorbals Die-Hards, and as for Heritage they seemed to have lost track of him. He, Dickson, was now the chief object of their care. But what could Dobson do if he refused? He dared not show his true hand. Yet he might, if sufficiently irritated. It became Dickson's immediate object to get the innkeeper to reveal himself by rousing his temper. He did not stop to consider the policy of this course; he imperatively wanted things cleared up and the issue made plain.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you for thinking so much about my comfort," he said in a voice into which he hoped he had insinuated a sneer. "But I'm bound to say you're awful suspicious folk about here. You needn't be feared for your old policies. There's plenty of nice walks about the roads, and I want to explore the sea-coast."

The last words seemed to annoy the innkeeper. "That's no' allowed either," he said. "The shore's as private as the policies. . . . Well, I wish ye joy tramping the roads in the glaur."

"It's a queer thing," said Dickson meditatively, "that you should keep an hotel and yet be set on discouraging people from visiting this neighbourhood. I tell you what, I believe that hotel of yours is all sham. You've some other business, you and these lodgekeepers, and in my opinion it's not a very creditable one."

"What d'ye mean?" asked Dobson sharply.

"Just what I say. You must expect a body to be suspicious, if you treat him as you're treating me." Loudon must have told this man the story with which he had been fobbed off about the half-witted Kennedy relative. Would Dobson refer to that?

The innkeeper had an ugly look on his face, but he controlled his temper with an effort. "There's no cause for suspicion," he said. "As far as I'm concerned it's all honest and aboveboard."

"It doesn't look like it. It looks as if you were hiding something up in the House which you don't want me to see."

Dobson jumped from his chair, his face pale with anger. A man in pyjamas on a raw morning does not feel at his bravest, and Dickson quailed under the expectation of assault. But even in his fright he realised that Loudon could not have told Dobson the tale of the half-witted lady. The last remark had cut clean through all camouflage and reached the quick.

"What the hell d' ye mean?" he cried. "Ye're a spy, are ye? Ye fat little fool, for two cents I'd wring your neck."

Now it is an odd trait of certain mild people that a suspicion of threat, a hint of bullying, will rouse some unsuspected obstinacy deep down in their souls. The insolence of the man's speech woke a quiet but efficient little devil in Dickson.

"That's a bonny tone to adopt in addressing a gentleman. If you've nothing to hide what way are you so touchy? I can't be a spy unless there's something to spy on."

The innkeeper pulled himself together. He was apparently acting on instructions, and had not yet come to the end of them. He made an attempt at a smile.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon if I spoke too hot. But it nettled me to hear ye say that. . . . I'll be quite frank with ye, Mr. McCunn, and, believe me, I'm speaking in your best interests. I give ye my word there's nothing wrong up at the House. I'm on the side of the law, and when I tell ye the whole story ye'll admit it. But I can't tell it ye yet. . . .

This is a wild, lonely bit and very few folk bide in it. And these are wild times, when a lot of queer things happen that never get into the papers. I tell ye it's for your own good to leave Dalquharter for the present. More I can't say, but I ask ye to look at it as a sensible man. Ye're one that's accustomed to a quiet life and no' meant for rough work. Ye'll do no good if you stay, and, maybe, ye'll land yourself in bad trouble."

"Mercy on us!" Dickson exclaimed. "What is it you're expecting? Sinn Fein?"

The innkeeper nodded. "Something like that."

"Did you ever hear the like? I never did think much of the Irish."

"Then ye'll take my advice and go home? Tell ye what, I'll drive ye to the station."

Dickson got up from the bed, found his new safety-razor and began to strop it. "No, I think I'll bide. If you're right there'll be more to see than glaury roads."

"I'm warning ye, fair and honest. Ye . . . can't . . . be . . . allowed . . . to . . . stay . . . here!"

"Well, I never!" said Dickson. "Is there any law in Scotland, think you, that forbids a man to stop a day or two with his auntie?"

"Ye'll stay?"

"Ay, I'll stay."

"By God, we'll see about that."

For a moment Dickson thought that he would be attacked, and he measured the distance that separated him from the peg whence hung his waterproof

with the pistol in its pocket. But the man restrained himself and moved to the door. There he stood and cursed him with a violence and a venom which Dickson had not believed possible. The full hand was on the table now.

"Ye wee pot-bellied, pig-heided Glasgow grocer," (I paraphrase), "would *you* set up to defy me? I tell ye, I'll make ye rue the day ye were born." His parting words were a brilliant sketch of the maltreatment in store for the body of the defiant one.

"Impident dog," said Dickson without heat. He noted with pleasure that the innkeeper hit his head violently against the low lintel, and, missing a step, fell down the loft stairs into the kitchen, where Mrs. Morran's tongue could be heard speeding him trenchantly from the premises.

Left to himself, Dickson dressed leisurely, and by and by went down to the kitchen and watched his hostess making broth. The fracas with Dobson had done him all the good in the world, for it had cleared the problem of dubieties and had put an edge on his temper. But he realised that it made his continued stay in the cottage undesirable. He was now the focus of all suspicion, and the innkeeper would be as good as his word and try to drive him out of the place by force. Kidnapping, most likely, and that would be highly unpleasant, besides putting an end to his usefulness. Clearly he must join the others. The soul of Dickson hungered at the moment for human companionship. He felt that his courage would be sufficient for any

team-work, but might waver again if he were left to play a lone hand.

He lunched nobly off three plates of Mrs. Morran's kail—an early lunch, for that lady, having breakfasted at five, partook of the midday meal about eleven. Then he explored her library, and settled himself by the fire with a volume of Covenanting tales, entitled *Gleanings among the Mountains*. It was a most practical work for one in his position, for it told how various eminent saints of that era escaped the attention of Claverhouse's dragoons. Dickson stored up in his memory several of the incidents in case they should come in handy. He wondered if any of his forbears had been Covenanters; it comforted him to think that some old progenitor might have hunkered behind turf walls and been chased for his life in the heather. "Just like me," he reflected. "But the dragoons weren't foreigners, and there was a kind of decency about Claverhouse too."

About four o'clock Dougal presented himself in the back kitchen. He was an even wilder figure than usual, for his bare legs were mud to the knees, his kilt and shirt clung sopping to his body, and, having lost his hat, his wet hair was plastered over his eyes. Mrs. Morran said, not unkindly, that he looked "like a wull-cat glowerin' through a whin buss."

"How are you, Dougal?" Dickson asked genially. "Is the peace of nature smoothing out the creases in your poor little soul?"

"What's that ye say?"

"Oh, just what I heard a man say in Glasgow. How have you got on?"

"Not so bad. Your telegram was sent this mornin'. Old Bill took it in to Kirkmichael. That's the first thing. Second, Thomas Yownie has took a party to get down the box from the station. He got Mrs. Sempill's powny and he took the box ayont the Laver by the ford at the herd's hoose and got it on to the shore maybe a mile ayont Laverfoot. He managed to get the machine up as far as the water, but he could get no farther, for ye'll no' get a machine over the wee waterfa' just before the Laver ends in the sea. So he sent one o' the men back with it to Mrs. Sempill, and, since the box was ower heavy to carry, he opened it and took the stuff across in bits. It's a' safe in the hole at the foot o' the Huntingtower rocks, and he reports that the rain has done it no harm. Thomas has made a good job of it. Ye'll no fickle Thomas Yownie."

"And what about your camp on the moor?"

"It was broke up afore daylight. Some of our things we've got with us, and most is hid near at hand. The tents are in the auld wife's henhoose," and he jerked his disreputable head in the direction of the back door.

"Have the tinklers been back?"

"Ay. They turned up about ten o'clock, no doubt intendin' murder. I left Wee Jaikie to watch developments. They fund him sittin' on a stone, greetin' sore. When he saw them, he up and started to run, and they cried on him to stop, but

he wouldn't listen. Then they cried out where were the rest, and he telled them they were feared for their lives and had run away. After that they offered to catch him, but ye'll no' catch Jaikie in a hurry. When he had run round about them till they were wappit, he out wi' his catty and got one o' them on the lug. Syne he made for the Laverfoot and reported."

"Man, Dougal, you've managed fine. Now I've something to tell you," and Dickson recounted his interview with the innkeeper. "I don't think it's safe for me to bide here, and if I did, I wouldn't be any use, hiding in cellars and such like, and not daring to stir a foot. I'm coming with you to the House. Now tell me how to get there."

Dougal agreed to this view. "There's been nothing doing at the Hoose the day, but they're keepin' a close watch on the policies. The cripus may come any moment. There's no doubt, Mr. McCunn, that ye're in danger, for they'll serve you as the tinklers tried to serve us. Listen to me. Ye'll walk up the station road, and take the second turn on your left, a wee grass road that'll bring ye to the ford at the herd's hoose. Cross the Laver—there's a plank bridge—and take straight across the moor in the direction of the peakit hill they call Grey Carrick. Ye'll come to a big burn, which ye must follow till ye get to the shore. Then turn south, keepin' the water's edge till ye reach the Laver, where you'll find one o' us to show ye the rest of the road. . . . I must be off now, and I advise ye not to be slow of startin'. for wi' this rain

the water's risin' quick. It's a mercy it's such coarse weather, for it spoils the veesibility."

"Auntie Phemie," said Dickson a few minutes later, "will you oblige me by coming for a short walk?"

"The man's daft," was the answer.

"I'm not. I'll explain if you'll listen. . . . You see," he concluded, "the dangerous bit for me is just the mile out of the village. They'll no' be so likely to try violence if there's somebody with me that could be a witness. Besides, they'll maybe suspect less if they just see a decent body out for a breath of air with his auntie."

Mrs. Morran said nothing, but retired, and returned presently equipped for the road. She had indued her feet with goloshes and pinned up her skirts till they looked like some demented Paris mode. An ancient bonnet was tied under her chin with strings, and her equipment was completed by an exceedingly smart tortoise-shell-handled umbrella, which, she explained, had been a Christmas present from her son.

"I'll convoy ye as far as the Laverfoot herd's," she announced. "The wife's a freend o' mine and will set me a bit on the road back. Ye needna fash for me. I'm used to a' weathers."

The rain had declined to a fine drizzle, but a tearing wind from the south-west scoured the land. Beyond the shelter of the trees the moor was a battle-ground of gusts which swept the puddles into spindrift and gave to the stagnant bog-pools the appearance of running water. The wind was behind

the travellers, and Mrs. Morran, like a full-rigged ship, was hustled before it, so that Dickson, who had linked arms with her, was sometimes compelled to trot.

"However will you get home, mistress?" he murmured anxiously.

"Fine. The wind will fa' at the darkenin'. This'll be a sair time for ships at sea."

Not a soul was about, as they breasted the ascent of the station road and turned down the grassy bypath to the Laverfoot herd's. The herd's wife saw them from afar and was at the door to receive them.

"Megsty! Phemie Morran!" she shrilled. "Wha wad ettle to see ye on a day like this? John's awa' at Dumfries, buyin' tups. Come in, the baith o' ye. The kettle's on the boil."

"This is my nevoy Dickson," said Mrs. Morran. "He's gaun to stretch his legs ayont the burn, and come back by the Ayr road. But I'll be blithe to tak' my tea wi' ye, Elspeth. . . . Now, Dickson, I'll expect ye back on the chap o' seeven."

He crossed the rising stream on a swaying plank and struck into the moorland, as Dougal had ordered, keeping the bald top of Grey Carrick before him. In that wild place with the tempest battling overhead he had no fear of human enemies. Steadily he covered the ground, till he reached the west-flowing burn that was to lead him to the shore. He found it an entertaining companion, swirling into black pools, foaming over little falls, and lying in dark canal-like stretches in the flats. Presently

it began to descend steeply in a narrow green gully, where the going was bad, and Dickson, weighted with pack and waterproof, had much ado to keep his feet on the sodden slopes. Then, as he rounded a crook of hill, the ground fell away from his feet, the burn swept in a water-slide to the boulders of the shore, and the storm-tossed sea lay before him.

It was now that he began to feel nervous. Being on the coast again seemed to bring him inside his enemies' territory, and had not Dobson specifically forbidden the shore? It was here that they might be looking for him. He felt himself out of condition, very wet and very warm, but he attained a creditable pace, for he struck a road which had been used by manure-carts collecting seaweed. There were faint marks on it, which he took to be the wheels of Dougal's "machine" carrying the provision-box. Yes. On a patch of gravel there was a double set of tracks, which showed how it had returned to Mrs. Sempill. He was exposed to the full force of the wind, and the strenuousness of his bodily exertions kept his fears quiescent, till the cliffs on his left sunk suddenly and the valley of the Laver lay before him.

A small figure rose from the shelter of a boulder, the warrior who bore the name of Old Bill. He saluted gravely.

"Ye're just in time. The water has rose three inches since I've been here. Ye'd better strip."

Dickson removed his boots and socks. "Breeks, too," commanded the boy; "there's deep holes ayont thae stanes."

Dickson obeyed, feeling very chilly, and rather improper. "Now, follow me," said the guide. The next moment he was stepping delicately on very sharp pebbles, holding on to the end of the scout's pole, while an icy stream ran to his knees.

The Laver as it reaches the sea broadens out to the width of fifty or sixty yards and tumbles over little shelves of rock to meet the waves. Usually it is shallow, but now it was swollen to an average depth of a foot or more, and there were deeper pockets. Dickson made the passage slowly and miserably, sometimes crying out with pain as his toes struck a sharper flint, once or twice sitting down on a boulder to blow like a whale, once slipping on his knees and wetting the strange excrescence about his middle, which was his tucked-up waterproof. But the crossing was at length achieved, and on a patch of sea-pinks he dried himself perfunctorily and hastily put on his garments. Old Bill, who seemed to be regardless of wind or water, squatted beside him and whistled through his teeth.

Above them hung the sheer cliffs of the Huntingtower cape, so sheer that a man below was completely hidden from any watcher on the top. Dickson's heart fell, for he did not profess to be a cragsman and had indeed a horror of precipitous places. But as the two scrambled along the foot, they passed deep-cut gullies and fissures, most of them unclimbable, but offering something more hopeful than the face. At one of these Old Bill halted and led the way up and over a chaos of fallen

rock and loose sand. The grey weather had brought on the dark prematurely, and in the half-light it seemed that this ravine was blocked by an unscalable mass of rock. Here Old Bill whistled, and there was a reply from above. Round the corner of the mass came Dougal.

"Up here," he commanded. "It was Mr. Heritage that fund this road."

Dickson and his guide squeezed themselves between the mass and the cliff up a spout of stones, and found themselves in an upper storey of the gulley, very steep but practicable even for one who was no cragsman. This in turn ran out against a wall up which there led only a narrow chimney. At the foot of this were two of the Die-Hards, and there were others above, for a rope hung down by the aid of which a package was even now ascending.

"That's the top," said Dougal, pointing to the rim of sky, "and that's the last o' the supplies." Dickson noticed that he spoke in a whisper, and that all the movements of the Die-Hards were judicious and stealthy. "Now, it's your turn. Take a good grip o' the rope, and ye'll find plenty holes for your feet. It's no more than ten yards and ye're well held above."

Dickson made the attempt and found it easier than he expected. The only trouble was his pack and waterproof, which had a tendency to catch on jags of rock. A hand was reached out to him, he was pulled over the edge, and then pushed down on his face.

When he lifted his head Dougal and the others

had joined him and the whole company of the Die-Hards was assembled on a patch of grass which was concealed from the landward view by a thicket of hazels. Another, whom he recognised as Heritage, was coiling up the rope.

"We'd better get all the stuff into the old Tower for the present," Heritage was saying. "It's too risky to move it into the House now. We'll need the thickest darkness for that, after the moon is down. Quick, for the beastly thing will be rising soon and before that we must all be indoors."

Then he turned to Dickson, and gripped his hand. "You're a high class of sportsman, Dogson. And I think you're just in time."

"Are they due to-night?" Dickson asked in an excited whisper, faint against the wind.

"I don't know about They. But I've got a notion that some devilish queer things will happen before to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE CRUIVES

THE old keep of Huntingtower stood some three hundred yards from the edge of the cliffs, a gnarled wood of hazels and oaks protecting it from the sea-winds. It was still in fair preservation, having till twenty years before been an adjunct of the house of Dalquharter, and used as kitchen, buttery and servants' quarters. There had been residential wings attached, dating from the mid-eighteenth century, but these had been pulled down and used for the foundations of the new mansion. Now it stood a lonely shell, its three storeys, each a single great room connected by a spiral stone staircase, being dedicated to lumber and the storage of produce. But it was dry and intact, its massive oak doors defied any weapon short of artillery, its narrow unglazed windows would scarcely have admitted a cat—a place portentously strong, gloomy, but yet habitable.

Dougal opened the main door with a massy key. "The lassie fund it," he whispered to Dickson, "somewhere about the kitchen—and I guessed it was the key o' this castle. I was thinkin' that if things got ower hot it would be a good plan to flit here. Change our base, like." The Chieftain's occasional studies in war had trained his tongue to a military jargon.

In the ground room lay a fine assortment of oddments, including old bedsteads and servants' furniture, and what looked like ancient discarded deer-skin rugs. Dust lay thick over everything, and they heard the scurry of rats. A dismal place, indeed, but Dickson felt only its strangeness. The comfort of being back again among allies had quickened his spirit to an adventurous mood. The old lords of Huntingtower had once quarrelled and revelled and plotted here, and now here he was at the same game. Present and past joined hands over the gulf of years. The saga of Huntingtower was not ended.

The Die-Hards had brought with them their scanty bedding, their lanterns and camp kettles. These and the provisions from Mearns Street were stowed away in a corner.

"Now for the Hoose, men," said Dougal. They stole over the downs to the shrubbery, and Dickson found himself almost in the same place as he had lain in three days before, watching a dusky lawn, while the wet earth soaked through his trouser knees and the drip from the azaleas trickled over his spine. Two of the boys fetched the ladder and placed it against the verandah wall. Heritage first, then Dickson darted across the lawn and made the ascent. The six scouts followed, and the ladder was pulled up and hidden among the verandah litter. For a second the whole eight stood still and listened. There was no sound except the murmur of the now falling wind and the melancholy hooting of owls. The garrison had entered the Dark Tower.

A council in whispers was held in the garden room.

"Nobody must show a light," Heritage observed. "It mustn't be known that we're here. Only the Princess will have a lamp. Yes"—this in answer to Dickson, "she knows that we're coming—you too. We'll hunt for quarters later upstairs. You scouts, you must picket every possible entrance. The windows are safe, I think, for they are locked from the inside. So is the main door. But there's the verandah door, of which they have a key, and the back door beside the kitchen, and I'm not at all sure that there's not a way in by the boiler-house. You understand. We're holding this place against all comers. We must barricade the danger points. The headquarters of the garrison will be in the hall, where a scout must be always on duty. You've all got whistles? Well, if there's an attempt on the verandah door the picket will whistle once, if at the back door twice, if anywhere else three times, and it's everybody's duty, except the picket who whistles, to get back to the hall for orders."

"That's so," assented Dougal.

"If the enemy forces an entrance we must overpower him. Any means you like. Sticks or fists, and remember that if it's a scrap in the dark make for the man's throat. I expect you little devils have eyes like cats. The scoundrels must be kept away from the ladies at all costs. If the worst comes to the worst, the Princess has a revolver."

"So have I," said Dickson. "I got it in Glasgow."

"The deuce you have! Can you use it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you can hand it over to me, if you like. But it oughtn't to come to shooting, if it's only the three of them. The eight of us should be able to manage three and one of them lame. If the others turn up—well, God help us all! But we've got to make sure of one thing, that no one lays hands on the Princess so long as there's one of us left alive to hit out."

"Ye needn't be feared for that," said Dougal. There was no light in the room, but Dickson was certain that the morose face of the Chieftain was lit with unholy joy.

"Then off with you. Mr. McCunn and I will explain matters to the ladies."

When they were alone, Heritage's voice took a different key. "We're in for it, Dogson, old man. There's no doubt these three scoundrels expect reinforcements at any moment, and with them will be one who is the devil incarnate. He's the only thing on earth that that brave girl fears. It seems he is in love with her and has pestered her for years. She hated the sight of him, but he wouldn't take no, and being a powerful man—rich and well-born and all the rest of it—she had a desperate time. I gather he was pretty high in favour with the old Court. Then when the Bolsheviks started he went over to them, like plenty of other grandees, and now he's one of their chief brains—none of your callow revolutionaries, but a man of the world, a kind of genius, she says, who can hold his own anywhere.

She believes him to be in this country, and only waiting the right moment to turn up. Oh, it sounds ridiculous, I know, in Britain in the twentieth century, but I learned in the war that civilisation anywhere is a very thin crust. There are a hundred ways by which that kind of fellow could bamboozle all our law and police and spirit her away. That's the kind of crowd we have to face."

"Did she say what he was like in appearance?"

"A face like an angel—a lost angel, she says."

Dickson suddenly had an inspiration.

"D'you mind the man you said was an Australian—at Kirkmichael? I thought myself he was a foreigner. Well, he was asking for a place he called Darkwater, and there's no sich place in the countryside. I believe he meant Dalquharter. I believe he's the man she's feared of."

A gasped "By Jove!" came from the darkness. "Dogson, you've hit it. That was five days ago, and he must have got on the right trail by this time. He'll be here to-night. That's why the three have been lying so quiet to-day. Well, we'll go through with it, even if we haven't a dog's chance. Only I'm sorry that you should be mixed up in such a hopeless business."

"Why me more than you?"

"Because it's all pure pride and joy for me to be here. Good God, I wouldn't be elsewhere for worlds. It's the great hour of my life. I would gladly die for her."

"Tuts, that's no' the way to talk, man. Time enough to speak about dying when there's no other

way out. I'm looking at this thing in a business way. We'd better be seeing the ladies."

They groped into the pitchy hall, somewhere in which a Die-Hard was on picket, and down the passage to the smoking-room. Dickson blinked in the light of a very feeble lamp and Heritage saw that his hands were cumbered with packages. He deposited them on a sofa and made a ducking bow.

"I've come back, Mem, and glad to be back. Your jools are in safe keeping, and not all the blag-yirds in creation could get at them. I've come to tell you to cheer up—a stout heart to a stey brae, as the old folk say. I'm handling this affair as a business proposition, so don't be feared, Mem. If there are enemies seeking you, there's friends on the road too. . . . Now, you'll have had your dinner, but you'd maybe like a little dessert."

He spread before them a huge box of chocolates, the best that Mearns Street could produce, a box of candied fruits, and another of salted almonds. Then from his hideously overcrowded pockets he took another box, which he offered rather shyly. "That's some powder for your complexion. They tell me that ladies find it useful whiles."

The girl's strained face watched him at first in mystification, and then broke slowly into a smile. Youth came back to it, the smile changed to a laugh, a low rippling laugh like far-away bells. She took both his hands.

"You are kind," she said, "you are kind and brave. You are a de-ar."

And then she kissed him.

Now, as far as Dickson could remember, no one had ever kissed him except his wife. The light touch of her lips on his forehead was like the pressing of an electric button which explodes some powerful charge and alters the face of a countryside. He blushed scarlet; then he wanted to cry; then he wanted to sing. An immense exhilaration seized him, and I am certain that if at that moment the serried ranks of Bolshevism had appeared in the doorway, Dickson would have hurled himself upon them with a joyful shout.

Cousin Eugénie was earnestly eating chocolates, but Saskia had other business.

"You will hold the house?" she asked.

"Please God, yes," said Heritage. "I look at it this way. The time is very near when your three gaolers expect the others, their masters. They have not troubled you in the past two days as they threatened, because it was not worth while. But they won't want to let you out of their sight in the final hours, so they will almost certainly come here to be on the spot. Our object is to keep them out and confuse their plans. Somewhere in this neighbourhood, probably very near, is the man you fear most. If we nonplus the three watchers, they'll have to revise their policy, and that means a delay, and every hour's delay is a gain. Mr. McCunn has found out that the factor Loudon is in the plot, and he has purchase enough, it seems, to blanket for a time any appeal to the law. But Mr. McCunn has taken steps to circumvent him, and in twenty-four hours we should have help here."

"I do not want the help of your law," the girl interrupted. "It will entangle me."

"Not a bit of it," said Dickson cheerfully. "You see, Mem, they've clean lost track of the jools, and nobody knows where they are but me. I'm a truthful man, but I'll lie like a packman if I'm asked questions. For the rest, it's a question of kidnapping, I understand, and that's a thing that's not to be allowed. My advice is to go to our beds and get a little sleep while there's a chance of it. The Gorbals Die-Hards are grand watch-dogs."

This view sounded so reasonable that it was at once acted upon. The ladies' chamber was next door to the smoking-room—what had been the old schoolroom. Heritage arranged with Saskia that the lamp was to be kept burning low, and that on no account were they to move unless summoned by him. Then he and Dickson made their way to the hall, where there was a faint glimmer from the moon in the upper unshuttered windows—enough to reveal the figure of Wee Jaikie on duty at the foot of the staircase. They ascended to the second floor, where, in a large room above the hall, Heritage had bestowed his pack. He had managed to open a fold of the shutters, and there was sufficient light to see two big mahogany bedsteads without mattresses or bedclothes, and wardrobes and chests of drawers sheeted in holland. Outside the wind was rising again, but the rain had stopped. Angry watery clouds scurried across the heavens.

Dickson made a pillow of his waterproof, stretched himself on one of the bedsteads and, so

quiet was his conscience and so weary his body from the buffetings of the past days, was almost instantly asleep. It seemed to him that he had scarcely closed his eyes when he was awakened by Dougal's hand pinching his shoulder. He gathered that the moon was setting, for the room was pitchy dark.

"The three o' them is approachin' the kitchen door," whispered the Chieftain. "I seen them from a spy-hole I made out o' a ventilator."

"Is it barricaded?" asked Heritage, who had apparently not been asleep.

"Ay, but I've thought o' a far better plan. Why should we keep them out? They'll be safer inside. Listen! We might manage to get them in one at a time. If they can't get in at the kitchen door, they'll send one o' them round to get in by another door and open to them. That gives us a chance to get them separated, and lock them up. There's walth o' closets and hidy-holes all over the place, each with good doors and good keys to them. Supposin' we get the three o' them shut up—the others, when they come, will have nobody to guide them. Of course some time or other the three will break out, but it may be ower late for them. At present we're besieged and they're roamin' the country. Would it no' be far better if they were the ones lockit up and we were goin' loose?"

"Supposing they don't come in one at a time?" Dickson objected.

"We'll make them," said Dougal firmly. "There's no time to waste. Are ye for it?"

"Yes," said Heritage. "Who's at the kitchen door?"

"Peter Paterson. I told him no' to whistle, but to wait on me. . . . Keep your boots off. Ye're better in your stockin' feet. Wait you in the hall and see ye're well hidden, for likely whoever comes in will have a lantern. Just you keep quiet unless I give ye a cry. I've planned it a' out, and we're ready for them."

Dougal disappeared, and Dickson and Heritage, with their boots tied round their necks by their laces, crept out to the upper landing. The hall was impenetrably dark, but full of voices, for the wind was talking in the ceiling beams, and murmuring through the long passages. The walls creaked and muttered and little bits of plaster fluttered down. The noise was an advantage for the game of hide-and-seek they proposed to play, but it made it hard to detect the enemy's approach. Dickson, in order to get properly wakened, adventured as far as the smoking-room. It was black with night, but below the door of the adjacent room a faint line of light showed where the Princess's lamp was burning. He advanced to the window, and heard distinctly a foot on the gravel path that led to the verandah. This sent him back to the hall in search of Dougal, whom he encountered in the passage. That boy could certainly see in the dark, for he caught Dickson's wrist without hesitation.

"We've got Spittal in the wine-cellar," he whispered triumphantly. "The kitchen door was barricaded, and when they tried it, it wouldn't open.

'Bide here,' says Dobson to Spittal, 'and we'll go round by another door and come back and open to ye.' So off they went, and by that time Peter Paterson and me had the barricade down. As we expected, Spittal tried the key again and it opens quite easy. He comes in and locks it behind him, and, Dobson having took away the lantern, he gropes his way very carefu' towards the kitchen. There's a point where the wine-cellar door and the scullery door are aside each other. He should have taken the second, but I had it shut so he takes the first. Peter Paterson gave him a wee shove and he fell down the two-three steps into the cellar, and we turned the key on him. Yon cellar has a grand door and no windies."

"And Dobson and Léon are at the verandah door? With a light?"

"Thomas Yownie's on duty there. Ye can trust him. Ye'll no fickle Thomas Yownie."

The next minutes were for Dickson a delirium of excitement not unpleasantly shot with flashes of doubt and fear. As a child he had played hide-and-seek, and his memory had always cherished the delights of the game. But how marvellous to play it thus in a great empty house, at dark of night, with the heaven filled with tempest, and with death or wounds as the stakes!

He took refuge in a corner where a tapestry curtain and the side of a Dutch awmry gave him shelter, and from where he stood he could see the garden-room and the beginning of the tiled passage which led to the verandah door. That is to say, he

could have seen these things if there had been any light, which there was not. He heard the soft flitting of bare feet, for a delicate sound is often audible in a din when a loud noise is obscured. Then a gale of wind blew towards him, as from an open door, and far away gleamed the flickering light of a lantern.

Suddenly the light disappeared and there was a clatter on the floor and a breaking of glass. Either the wind or Thomas Yownie.

The verandah door was shut, a match spluttered and the lantern was relit. Dobson and Léon came into the hall, both clad in long mackintoshes which glistened from the weather. Dobson halted and listened to the wind howling in the upper spaces. He cursed it bitterly, looked at his watch, and then made an observation which woke the liveliest interest in Dickson lurking beside the awmry and Heritage ensconced in the shadow of a window-seat.

"He's late. He should have been here five minutes syne. It would be a dirty road for his car."

So the Unknown was coming that night. The news made Dickson the more resolved to get the watchers under lock and key before reinforcements arrived, and so put grit in their wheels. Then his party must escape—flee anywhere so long as it was far from Dalquharter.

"You stop here," said Dobson, "I'll go down and let Spidel in. We want another lamp. Get the one that the women use and for God's sake get a move on."

The sound of his feet died in the kitchen passage

and then rung again on the stone stairs. Dickson's ear of faith heard also the soft patter of naked feet as the Die-Hards preceded and followed him. He was delivering himself blind and bound into their hands.

For a minute or two there was no sound but the wind, which had found a loose chimney-cowl on the roof and screwed out of it an odd sound like the drone of a bagpipe. Dickson, unable to remain any longer in one place, moved into the centre of the hall, believing that Léon had gone to the smoking-room. It was a dangerous thing to do, for suddenly a match was lit a yard from him. He had the sense to drop low, and so was out of the main glare of the light. The man with the match apparently had no more, judging by his execrations. Dickson stood stock still, longing for the wind to fall so that he might hear the sound of the fellow's boots on the stone floor. He gathered that they were moving towards the smoking-room.

"Heritage," he whispered as loud as he dared, but there was no answer.

Then suddenly a moving body collided with him. He jumped a step back and then stood at attention. "Is that you, Dobson?" a voice asked.

Now behold the occasional advantage of a nickname. Dickson thought he was being addressed as "Dogson" after the Poet's fashion. Had he dreamed it was Léon he would not have replied, but fluttered off into the shadows and so missed a piece of vital news.

"Ay, it's me," he whispered.

His voice and accent were Scotch, like Dobson's, and Léon suspected nothing.

"I do not like this wind," he grumbled. "The Captain's letter said at dawn, but there is no chance of the Danish brig making your little harbour in this weather. She must lie off and land the men by boats. That I do not like. It is too public."

The news—tremendous news, for it told that the new-comers would come by sea, which had never before entered Dickson's head—so interested him that he stood dumb and ruminating. The silence made the Belgian suspect; he put out a hand and felt a waterproofed arm which might have been Dobson's. But the height of the shoulder proved that it was not the burly innkeeper. There was an oath, a quick movement, and Dickson went down with a knee on his chest and two hands at his throat.

"Heritage," he gasped. "Help!"

There was a sound of furniture scraped violently on the floor. A gurgle from Dickson served as a guide, and the Poet suddenly cascaded over the combatants. He felt for a head, found Léon's, and gripped the neck so savagely that the owner loosened his hold on Dickson. The last-named found himself being buffeted violently by heavy-shod feet which seemed to be manœuvring before an unseen enemy. He rolled out of the road and encountered another pair of feet, this time unshod. Then came a sound of a concussion, as if metal or wood had struck some part of a human frame, and then a stumble and fall.

After that a good many things all seemed to

happen at once. There was a sudden light, which showed Léon blinking with a short loaded life-preserver in his hand, and Heritage prone in front of him on the floor. It also showed Dickson the figure of Dougal, and more than one Die-Hard in the background. The light went out as suddenly as it had appeared. There was a whistle, and a hoarse "Come on, men," and then for two seconds there was a desperate silent combat. It ended with Léon's head meeting the floor so violently that its possessor became oblivious of further proceedings. He was dragged into a cubby-hole, which had once been used for coats and rugs, and the door locked on him. Then the light sprang forth again. It revealed Dougal and five Die-Hards, somewhat the worse for wear; it revealed also Dickson squatted with outspread waterproof very like a sitting hen.

"Where's Dobson?" he asked.

"In the boiler-house," and for once Dougal's gravity had laughter in it. "Govey Dick! but yon was a fecht! Me and Peter Paterson and Wee Jaikie started it, but it was the whole company afore the end. Are ye better, Jaikie?"

"Ay, I'm better," said a pallid midge.

"He kickit Jaikie in the stomach and Jaikie was seeck," Dougal explained. "That's the three accounted for. Now they're safe for five hours at the least. I think mysel' that Dobson will be the first to get out, but he'll have his work letting out the others. Now, I'm for flittin' to the old Tower. They'll no ken where we are for a long time, and anyway yon place will be far easier to defend.

Without they kindle a fire and smoke us out, I don't see how they'll beat us. Our provisions are a' there, and there's a grand well o' water inside. Forbye there's the road down the rocks that'll keep our communications open. . . . But what's come to Mr. Heritage?"

Dickson to his shame had forgotten all about his friend. The Poet lay very quiet with his head on one side and his legs crooked limply. Blood trickled over his eyes from an ugly scar on his forehead. Dickson felt his heart and pulse and found them faint but regular. The man had got a swinging blow and might have a slight concussion; for the present he was unconscious.

"All the more reason why we should flit," said Dougal. "What d'ye say, Mr. McCunn?"

"Flit, of course, but further than the old Tower. What's the time?" He lifted Heritage's wrist and saw from his watch that it was half-past three. "Mercy! It's nearly morning. Afore we put these blagyirds away, they were conversing, at least Léon and Dobson were. They said that they expected somebody every moment, but that the car would be late. We've still got that Somebody to tackle. Then Léon spoke to me in the dark, thinking I was Dobson, and cursed the wind, saying it would keep the Danish brig from getting in at dawn as had been intended. D'you see what that means? The worst of the lot, the ones the ladies are in terror of, are coming by sea. Ay, and they can return by sea. We thought that the attack would be by land, and that even if they succeeded we could

hang on to their heels and follow them, till we got them stopped. But that's impossible! If they come in from the water, they can go out by the water, and there'll never be more heard tell of the ladies or of you or me."

Dougal's face was once again sunk in gloom. "What's your plan, then?"

"We must get the ladies away from here—away inland, far from the sea. The rest of us must stand a siege in the old Tower, so that the enemy will think we're all there. Please God we'll hold out long enough for help to arrive. But we mustn't hang about here. There's the man Dobson mentioned—he may come any second, and we want to be away first. Get the ladder, Dougal. . . . Four of you take Mr. Heritage, and two come with me and carry the ladies' things. It's no' raining, but the wind's enough to take the wing's off a seagull."

Dickson roused Saskia and her cousin, bidding them be ready in ten minutes. Then with the help of the Die-Hards he proceeded to transport the necessary supplies—the stove, oil, dishes, clothes and wraps; more than one journey was needed of small boys, hidden under clouds of baggage. When everything had gone he collected the keys, behind which, in various quarters of the house, three gaolers fumed impotently, and gave them to Wee Jaikie to dispose of in some secret nook. Then he led the two ladies to the verandah, the elder cross and sleepy, the younger alert at the prospect of movement.

"Tell me again," she said. "You have locked

all the three up, and they are now the imprisoned?"

"Well, it was the boys that, properly speaking, did the locking up."

"It is a great—how do you say?—a turning of the tables. Ah—what is that?"

At the end of the verandah there was a clattering down of pots which could not be due to the wind, since the place was sheltered. There was still only the faintest hint of light, and black night still lurked in the crannies. Followed another fall of pots, as from a clumsy intruder, and then a man appeared, clear against the glass door by which the path descended to the rock garden.

It was the fourth man, whom the three prisoners had awaited. Dickson had no doubt at all about his identity. He was that villain from whom all the others took their orders, the man whom the Princess shuddered at. Before starting he had loaded his pistol. Now he tugged it from his waterproof pocket, pointed it at the other and fired.

The man seemed to be hit, for he spun round and clapped a hand to his left arm. Then he fled through the door, which he left open.

Dickson was after him like a hound. At the door he saw him running and raised his pistol for another shot. Then he dropped it, for he saw something in the crouching, dodging figure which was familiar.

"A mistake," he explained to Jaikie when he returned. "But the shot wasn't wasted. I've just had a good try at killing the factor!"

CHAPTER X

DEALS WITH AN ESCAPE AND A JOURNEY

FIVE scouts' lanterns burned smokily in the ground room of the keep when Dickson ushered his charges through its cavernous door. The lights flickered in the gusts that swept after them and whistled through the slits of window, so that the place was full of monstrous shadows, and its accustomed odour of mould and disuse was changed to a salty freshness. Upstairs on the first floor Thomas Yownie had deposited the ladies' baggage, and was busy making beds out of derelict iron bedsteads and the wraps brought from their room. On the ground floor on a heap of litter covered by an old scout's blanket lay Heritage, with Dougal in attendance.

The Chieftain had washed the blood from the Poet's brow and the touch of cold water was bringing back his senses. Saskia with a cry flew to him, and waved off Dickson who had fetched one of the bottles of liqueur brandy. She slipped a hand inside his shirt and felt the beating of his heart. Then her slim fingers ran over his forehead.

"A bad blow," she muttered, "but I do not think he is ill. There is no fracture. When I nursed in the Alexander Hospital I learnt much about head wounds. Do not give him cognac if you value his life."

Heritage was talking now and with strange tongues. Phrases like "lined digesters" and "free sulphurous acid" came from his lips. He implored some one to tell him if "the first cook" was finished, and he upbraided some one else for "cooling off" too fast.

The girl raised her head. "But I fear he has become mad," she said.

"Wheesht, Mem," said Dickson, who recognised the jargon. "He's a paper maker."

Saskia sat down on the litter and lifted his head so that it rested on her breast. Dougal at her bidding brought a certain case from her baggage, and with swift, capable hands she made a bandage and rubbed the wound with ointment before tying it up. Then her fingers seemed to play about his temples and along his cheeks and neck. She was the professional nurse now, absorbed, sexless. Heritage ceased to babble, his eyes shut and he was asleep.

She remained where she was, so that the Poet, when a few minutes later he woke, found himself lying with his head in her lap. She spoke first, in an imperative tone: "You are well now. Your head does not ache. You are strong again."

"No. Yes," he murmured. Then more clearly: "Where am I? Oh, I remember, I caught a lick on the head. What's become of the brutes?"

Dickson, who had extracted food from the Mearns Street box and was pressing it on the others, replied through a mouthful of biscuit: "We're in the old Tower. The three are lockit up in the House. Are you feeling better, Mr. Heritage?"

The Poet suddenly realised Saskia's position and the blood came to his pale face. He got to his feet with an effort and held out a hand to the girl. "I'm all right now, I think. Only a little dicky on my legs. A thousand thanks, Princess. I've given you a lot of trouble."

She smiled at him tenderly. "You say that when you have risked your life for me."

"There's no time to waste," the relentless Dougal broke in. "Comin' over here, I heard a shot. What was it?"

"It was me," said Dickson. "I was shootin' at the factor."

"Did ye hit him?"

"I think so, but I'm sorry to say not badly. When I last saw him he was running too quick for a sore hurt man. When I fired I thought it was the other man—the one they were expecting."

Dickson marvelled at himself, yet his speech was not bravado but the honest expression of his mind. He was keyed up to a mood in which he feared nothing very much, certainly not the laws of his country. If he fell in with the Unknown, he was entirely resolved, if his Maker permitted him, to do murder as being the simplest and justest solution. And if in the pursuit of this laudable intention he happened to wing lesser game it was no fault of his.

"Well, it's a pity ye didn't get him," said Dougal, "him being what we ken him to be. . . . I'm for holding a council o' war, and considerin' the whole position. So far we haven't done that badly. We've shifted our base without serious casualties.

We've got a far better position to hold, for there's too many ways into yon Hoose, and here there's just one. Besides, we've fickleed the enemy. They'll take some time to find out where we've gone. But, mind you, we can't count on their staying long shut up. Dobson's no' safe in the boiler-house, for there's a skylight far up and he'll see it when the light comes and maybe before. So we'd better get our plans ready. A word with ye, Mr. McCunn," and he led Dickson aside.

"D'ye ken what these blagyirds were up to," he whispered fiercely in Dickson's ear. "They were goin' to pushion the lassie. How do I ken, says you? Because Thomas Yownie heard Dobson say to Lean at the scullery door, 'Have ye got the dope?' he says, and Lean says, 'Ay.' Thomas mindit the word for he had heard about it at the Picters."

Dickson exclaimed in horror.

"What d'ye make o' that? I'll tell ye. They wanted to make sure of her, but they wouldn't have thought o' dope unless the men they expectit were due to arrive any moment. As I see it, we've to face a siege not by the three but by a dozen or more, and it'll no' be long till it starts. Now, isn't it a mercy we're safe in here?"

Dickson returned to the others with a grave face.

"Where d'you think the new folk are coming from?" he asked.

Heritage answered, "From Auchenlòchan, I suppose? Or perhaps down from the hills?"

"You're wrong." And he told of Léon's mis-

taken confidences to him in the darkness. "They are coming from the sea, just like the old pirates."

"The sea," Heritage repeated in a dazed voice.

"Ay, the sea. Think what that means. If they had been coming by the roads, we could have kept track of them, even if they beat us, and some of these laddies could have stuck to them and followed them up till help came. It can't be such an easy job to carry a young lady against her will along Scotch roads. But the sea's a different matter. If they've got a fast boat they could be out of the Firth and away beyond the law before we could wake up a single policeman. Ay, and even if the Government took it up and warned all the ports and ships at sea, what's to hinder them to find a hidy-hole about Ireland—or Norway? I tell you, it's a far more desperate business than I thought, and it'll no' do to wait on and trust that the Chief Constable will turn up afore the mischief's done."

"The moral," said Heritage, "is that there can be no surrender. We've got to stick it out in this old place at all costs."

"No," said Dickson emphatically. "The moral is that we must shift the ladies. We've got the chance while Dobson and his friends are locked up. Let's get them as far away as we can from the sea. They're far safer tramping the moors, and it's no' likely the new folk will dare to follow us."

"But I cannot go." Saskia, who had been listening intently, shook her head. "I promised to wait here till my friend came. If I leave I shall never find him."

"If you stay you certainly never will, for you'll be away with the ruffians. Take a sensible view, Mem. You'll be no good to your friend or your friend to you if before night you're rocking in a ship."

The girl shook her head again, gently but decisively. "It was our arrangement. I cannot break it. Besides, I am sure that he will come in time; for he has never failed——"

There was a desperate finality about the quiet tones and the weary face with the shadow of a smile on it.

Then Heritage spoke. "I don't think your plan will quite do, Dogson. Supposing we all break for the hinterland and the Danish brig finds the birds flown, that won't end the trouble. They will get on the Princess's trail; and the whole persecution will start again. I want to see things brought to a head here and now. If we can stick it out here long enough, we may trap the whole push and rid the world of a pretty gang of miscreants. Once let them show their hand, and then, if the police are here by that time, we can jug the lot for piracy or something worse."

"That's all right," said Dougal, "but we'd put up a better fight if we had the women off our mind. I've aye read that when a castle was going to be besieged the first thing was to rid get of the civilians."

"Sensible to the last, Dougal," said Dickson approvingly. "That's just what I'm saying. I'm

strong for a fight, but put the ladies in a safe bit first, for they're our weak point."

"Do you think that if you were fighting my enemies, I would consent to be absent?" came Saskia's reproachful question.

"'Deed no, Mem," said Dickson heartily. His martial spirit was with Heritage, but his prudence did not sleep, and he suddenly saw a way of placating both. "Just you listen to what I propose. What do we amount to? Mr. Heritage, six laddies, and myself—and I'm no more used to fighting than an old wife. We've seven desperate villains against us, and afore night they may be seventy. We've a fine old castle here, but for defence we want more than stone walls—we want a garrison. I tell you we must get help somewhere. Ay, but how, says you? Well, coming here I noticed a gentleman's house away up ayont the railway and close to the hills. The laird's maybe not at home, but there will be men there of some kind—gamekeepers and woodmen and such like. My plan is to go there at once and ask for help. Now, it's useless me going alone, for nobody would listen to me. They'd tell me to go back to the shop or they'd think me demented. But with you, Mem, it would be a different matter. They wouldn't disbelieve you. So I want you to come with me and to come at once, for God knows how soon our need will be sore. We'll leave your cousin with Mrs. Morran in the village, for bed's the place for her, and then you and me will be off on our business."

The girl looked at Heritage, who nodded. "It's the only way," he said. "Get every man jack you can raise, and if it's humanly possible get a gun or two. I believe there's time enough, for I don't see the brig arriving in broad daylight."

"D'you not?" Dickson asked rudely. "Have you considered what day this is? It's the Sabbath, the best of days for an ill deed. There's no kirk hereaways, and everybody in the parish will be sitting indoors by the fire." He looked at his watch. "In half an hour it'll be light. Haste you, Mem, and get ready. Dougal, what's the weather?"

The Chieftain swung open the door, and sniffed the air. The wind had fallen for the time being, and the surge of the tides below the rocks rose like the clamour of a mob. With the lull, mist and a thin drizzle had cloaked the world again.

To Dickson's surprise Dougal seemed to be in good spirits. He began to sing to a hymn tune a strange ditty.

"Class-conscious we are, and class-conscious will be
Till our fit's on the neck o' the Boorjoyzee."

"What on earth are you singing?" Dickson inquired.

Dougal grinned. "Wee Jaikie went to a Socialist Sunday school last winter because he heard they were for fechtin' battles. Ay, and they telled him he was to jine a thing called an International, and Jaikie thought it was a fitba' club. But when he fund out there was no magic lantern or swaree at

Christmas he gie'd it the chuck. They learned him a heap o' queer songs. That's one."

"What does the last word mean?"

"I don't ken. Jaikie thought it was some kind of a draigon."

"It's a daft-like thing anyway. . . . When's high water?"

Dougal answered that to the best of his knowledge it fell between four and five in the afternoon.

"Then that's when we may expect the foreign gentry if they think to bring their boat in to the Garple foot. . . . Dougal, lad, I trust you to keep a most careful and prayerful watch. You had better get the Die-Hards out of the Tower and all round the place afore Dobson and Co. get loose, or you'll no' get a chance later. Don't lose your mobility, as the sodgers say. Mr. Heritage can hold the fort, but you laddies should be spread out like a screen."

"That was my notion," said Dougal. "I'll detail two Die-Hards—Thomas Yownie and Wee Jaikie—to keep in touch with ye and watch for ye comin' back. Thomas ye ken already; ye'll no fickle Thomas Yownie. But don't be mistook about Wee Jaikie. He's terrible fond of greetin', but it's no fright with him but excitement. It's just a habit he's gotten. When ye see Jaikie begin to greet, ye may be sure that Jaikie's gettin' dangerous."

The door shut behind them and Dickson found himself with his two charges in a world dim with fog and rain and the still lingering darkness. The air was raw, and had the sour smell which comes

from soaked earth and wet boughs when the leaves are not yet fledged. Both the women were miserably equipped for such an expedition. Cousin Eugénie trailed heavy furs, Saskia's only wrap was a bright-coloured shawl about her shoulders, and both wore thin foreign shoes. Dickson insisted on stripping off his trusty waterproof and forcing it on the Princess, on whose slim body it hung very loose and very short. The elder woman stumbled and whimpered and needed the constant support of his arm, walking like a townswoman from the knees. But Saskia swung from the hips like a free woman, and Dickson had much ado to keep up with her. She seemed to delight in the bitter freshness of the dawn, inhaling deep breaths of it, and humming fragments of a tune.

Guided by Thomas Yownie they took the road which Dickson and Heritage had travelled the first evening, through the shrubberies on the north side of the House and the side avenue beyond which the ground fell to the Laver glen. On their right the House rose like a dark cloud, but Dickson had lost his terror of it. There were three angry men inside it, he remembered: long let them stay there. He marvelled at his mood, and also rejoiced, for his worst fear had always been that he might prove a coward. Now he was puzzled to think how he could ever be frightened again, for his one object was to succeed, and in that absorption fear seemed to him merely a waste of time. "It all comes of treating the thing as a business proposition," he told himself.

But there was far more in his heart than this sober resolution. He was intoxicated with the resurgence of youth and felt a rapture of audacity which he never remembered in his decorous boyhood. "I haven't been doing badly for an old man," he reflected with glee. What, oh, what had become of the pillar of commerce, the man who might have been a Bailie had he sought municipal honours, the elder in the Guthrie Memorial Kirk, the instructor of literary young men? In the past three days he had levanted with jewels which had once been an Emperor's and certainly were not his; he had burglariously entered and made free of a strange house; he had played hide-and-seek at the risk of his neck and had wrestled in the dark with a foreign miscreant; he had shot at an eminent solicitor with intent to kill; and he was now engaged in tramping the world with a fairy-tale Princess. I blush to confess that of each of his doings he was unashamedly proud, and thirsted for many more in the same line. "Gosh, but I'm seeing life," was his unregenerate conclusion.

Without sight or sound of a human being, they descended to the Laver, climbed again by the cart track, and passed the deserted West Lodge and inn to the village. It was almost full dawn when the three stood in Mrs. Morran's kitchen.

"I've brought you two ladies, Auntie Phemie," said Dickson. *and of course*

They made an odd group in that cheerful place, where the new-lit fire was crackling in the big grate—the wet undignified form of Dickson, unshaven

of cheek and chin and disreputable in garb: the shrouded figure of Cousin Eugénie, who had sunk into the arm-chair and closed her eyes; the slim girl, into whose face the weather had whipped a glow like blossom; and the hostess, with her petticoats kilted and an ancient mutch on her head.

Mrs. Morran looked once at Saskia, and then did a thing which she had not done since her girlhood. She curtseyed.

"I'm proud to see ye here, Mem. Off wi' your things, and I'll get ye dry claes. Losh, ye're fair soppin'. And your shoon! Ye maun change your feet. . . . Dickson! Awa' up to the loft, and dinna you stir till I give ye a cry. The leddies will change by the fire. And you, Mem"—this to Cousin Eugénie—"the place for you's your bed. I'll kinnle a fire ben the hoose in a jiffy. And syne ye'll have breakfast—ye'll hae a cup o' tea wi' me now, for the kettle's just on the boil. Awa' wi' ye, Dickson," and she stamped her foot.

Dickson departed, and in the loft washed his face, and smoked a pipe on the edge of the bed, watching the mist eddying up the village street. From below rose the sounds of hospitable bustle, and when after some twenty minutes' vigil he descended, he found Saskia toasting stockinged toes by the fire in the great arm-chair, and Mrs. Morran setting the table.

"Auntie Phemie, hearken to me. We've taken on too big a job for two men and six laddies, and help we've got to get, and that this very morning. D'you mind the big white house away up near the

hills ayont the station and east of the Ayr road? It looked like a gentleman's shooting lodge. I was thinking of trying there. Mercy!"

The exclamation was wrung from him by his eyes settling on Saskia and noting her apparel. Gone were her thin foreign clothes, and in their place she wore a heavy tweed skirt cut very short, and thick homespun stockings, which had been made for some one with larger feet than hers. A pair of the coarse low-heeled shoes, which country folk wear in the farmyard, stood warming by the hearth. She still had her russet jumper, but round her neck hung a grey wool scarf, of the kind known as a "comforter." Amazingly pretty she looked in Dickson's eyes, but with a different kind of prettiness. The sense of fragility had fled, and he saw how nobly built she was for all her exquisiteness. She looked like a queen, he thought, but a queen to go gipsying through the world with.

"Ay, they're some o' Elspeth's things, rale guid furthy claes," said Mrs. Morran complacently. "And the shoon are what she used to gang about the byres wi' when she was in the Castlewham dairy. The led dy was tellin' me she was for trampin' the hills, and thae things will keep her dry and warm. . . . I ken the hoose ye mean. They ca' it the Mains of Garple. And I ken the man that bides in it. He's yin Sir Erchibald Roylance. English, but his mither was a Dalziel. I'm no weel acquaint wi' his forbears, but I'm weel eneuch acquaint wi' Sir Erchie, and 'better a guid coo than a coo o' a guid kind,' as my mither used to say. He used to

be an awfu' wild callant, a freend o' puir Maister Quentin, and up to ony deevilry. But they tell me he's a quieter lad since the war, and sair lamed by fa'in' oot o' an airyplane."

"Will he be at the Mains just now?" Dickson asked.

"I wadna wonder. He has a muckle place in England, but he aye used to come here in the back-end for the shootin' and in Aprile for birds. He's clean daft about birds. He'll be out a' day at the Craig watchin' solans, or lyin' a' mornin' i' the moss lookin' at bog-blitters."

"Will he help, think you?"

"I'll wager he'll help. Onyway it's your best chance, and better a wee bush than nae beild. Now, sit in to your breakfast."

It was a merry meal. Mrs. Morran dispensed tea and gnostic wisdom. Saskia ate heartily, speaking little, but once or twice laying her hand softly on her hostess's gnarled fingers. Dickson was in such spirits that he gobbled shamelessly, being both hungry and hurried, and he spoke of the still unconquered enemy with ease and disrespect, so that Mrs. Morran was moved to observe that there was "naething sae bauld as a blind mear." But when in a sudden return of modesty he belittled his usefulness and talked sombrely of his mature years he was told that he "wad never be auld wi' sae muckle honesty." Indeed it was very clear that Mrs. Morran approved of her nephew.

They did not linger over breakfast, for both were impatient to be on the road. Mrs. Morran assisted

Saskia to put on Elspeth's shoes. " 'Even a young fit finds comfort in an auld bauchle,' as my mother, honest woman, used to say." Dickson's waterproof was restored to him, and for Saskia an old rain-coat belonging to the son in South Africa was discovered, which fitted her better. "Siccan weather," said the hostess, as she opened the door to let in a swirl of wind. "The deil's aye kind to his ain. Haste ye back, Mem, and be sure I'll tak' guid care o' your leddy cousin."

The proper way to the Mains of Garple was either by the station and the Ayr road, or by the Auchenlochan highway, branching off half a mile beyond the Garple bridge. But Dickson, who had been studying the map and fancied himself as a pathfinder, chose the direct route across the Long Muir as being at once shorter and more sequestered. With the dawn the wind had risen again, but it had shifted towards the north-west and was many degrees colder. The mist was furling on the hills like sails, the rain had ceased, and out at sea the eye covered a mile or two of wild water. The moor was drenching wet, and the peat bogs were brimming with inky pools, so that soon the travellers were soaked to the knees. Dickson had no fear of pursuit, for he calculated that Dobson and his friends, even if they had got out, would be busy looking for the truants in the vicinity of the House and would presently be engaged with the old Tower. But he realised, too, that speed on his errand was vital, for at any moment the Unknown might arrive from the sea.

So he kept up a good pace, half-running, half-striding, till they had passed the railway, and he found himself gasping with a stitch in his side, and compelled to rest in the lee of what had once been a sheepfold. Saskia amazed him. She moved over the rough heather like a deer, and it was her hand that helped him across the deeper hags. Before such youth and vigour he felt clumsy and old. She stood looking down at him as he recovered his breath, cool, unruffled, alert as Diana. His mind fled to Heritage, and it occurred to him suddenly that the Poet had set his affections very high. Loyalty drove him to speak a word for his friend.

"I've got the easy job," he said. "Mr. Heritage will have the whole pack on him in that old Tower, and him with such a sore clout on his head. I've left him my pistol. He's a terrible brave man!"

She smiled.

"Ay, and he's a poet too."

"So?" she said. "I did not know. He is very young."

"He's a man of very high ideels."

She puzzled at the word, and then smiled. "I know him. He is like many of our young men in Russia, the students—his mind is in a ferment and he does not know what he wants. But he is brave."

This seemed to Dickson's loyal soul but a chilly tribute.

"I think he is in love with me," she continued.

He looked up startled and saw in her face that which gave him a view into a strange new world.

He had thought that women blushed when they talked of love, but her eyes were as grave and candid as a boy's. Here was one who had gone through waters so deep that she had lost the foibles of sex. Love to her was only a word of ill omen, a threat on the lips of brutes, an extra battalion of peril in an army of perplexities. He felt like some homely rustic who finds himself swept unwittingly into the moonlight hunt of Artemis and her maidens.

"He is a romantic," she said. "I have known so many like him."

"He's no' that," said Dickson shortly. "Why, he used to be aye laughing at me for being romantic. He's one that's looking for truth and reality, he says, and he's terrible down on the kind of poetry I like myself."

She smiled. "They all talk so. But you, my friend Dickson" (she pronounced the name in two staccato syllables ever so prettily), "you are different. Tell me about yourself."

"I'm just what you see—a middle-aged retired grocer."

"Grocer?" she queried. "Ah, yes, *épiciier*. But you are a very remarkable *épiciier*. Mr. Heritage I understand, but you and those little boys—no. I am sure of one thing—you are not a romantic. You are too humorous and—and—— I think you are like Ulysses, for it would not be easy to defeat you."

Her eyes were kind, nay affectionate, and Dickson experienced a preposterous rapture in his soul, fol-

lowed by a sinking, as he realised how far the job was still from being completed.

"We must be getting on, Mem," he said hastily, and the two plunged again into the heather.

The Ayr road was crossed, and the fir wood around the Mains became visible, and presently the white gates of the entrance. A wind-blown spire of smoke beyond the trees proclaimed that the house was not untenanted. As they entered the drive the Scots firs were tossing in the gale, which blew fiercely at this altitude, but, the dwelling itself being more in the hollow, the daffodil clumps on the lawn were but mildly fluttered.

The door was opened by a one-armed butler who bore all the marks of the old regular soldier. Dickson produced a card and asked to see his master on urgent business. Sir Archibald was at home, he was told, and had just finished breakfast. The two were led into a large bare chamber which had all the chill and mustiness of a bachelor's drawing-room. The butler returned, and said Sir Archibald would see him. "I'd better go myself first and prepare the way, Mem," Dickson whispered and followed the man across the hall.

He found himself ushered into a fair-sized room where a bright fire was burning. On a table lay the remains of breakfast, and the odour of food mingled pleasantly with the scent of peat. The horns and heads of big game, foxes' masks, the model of a gigantic salmon and several bookcases adorned the wall, and books and maps were mixed with decanters and cigar-boxes on the long sideboard.

After the wild out of doors the place seemed the very shrine of comfort. A young man sat in an armchair by the fire with a leg on a stool; he was smoking a pipe, and reading the *Field*, and on another stool at his elbow was a pile of new novels. He was a pleasant brown-faced young man, with remarkably smooth hair and a roving humorous eye.

"Come in, Mr. McCunn. Very glad to see you. If, as I take it, you're the grocer, you're a household name in these parts. I get all my supplies from you, and I've just been makin' inroads on one of your divine hams. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I'm very proud to hear what you say, Sir Archibald. But I've not come on business. I've come with the queerest story you ever heard in your life, and I've come to ask your help."

"Go ahead. A good story is just what I want this vile mornin'."

"I'm not here alone. I've a lady with me."

"God bless my soul! A lady!"

"Ay, a princess. She's in the next room."

The young man looked wildly at him and waved the book he had been reading.

"Excuse me, Mr. McCunn, but are you quite sober? I beg your pardon. I see you are. But you know, it isn't done. Princesses don't as a rule come here after breakfast to pass the time of day. It's more absurd than this shocker I've been readin'."

"All the same it's a fact. She'll tell you the story herself, and you'll believe her quick enough. But

to prepare your mind I'll just give you a sketch of the events of the last few days."

Before the sketch was concluded the young man had violently rung the bell. "Sime," he shouted to the servant, "clear away this mess and lay the table again. Order more breakfast, all the breakfast you can get. Open the windows and get the tobacco smoke out of the air. Tidy up the place for there's a lady comin'. Quick, you juggins!"

He was on his feet now, and, with his arm in Dickson's, was heading for the door.

"My sainted aunt! And you topped off with pottin' at the factor. I've seen a few things in my day, but I'm blessed if I ever met a bird like you!"

CHAPTER XI

GRAVITY OUT OF BED

IT is probable that Sir Archibald Roylance did not altogether believe Dickson's tale; it may be that he considered him an agreeable romancer, or a little mad, or no more than a relief to the tedium of a wet Sunday morning. But his incredulity did not survive one glance at Saskia as she stood in that bleak drawing-room among Victorian water-colours and faded chintzes. The young man's boyishness deserted him. He stopped short in his tracks, and made a profound and awkward bow. "I am at your service, Mademoiselle," he said, amazed at himself. The words seemed to have come out of a confused memory of plays and novels.

She inclined her head—a little on one side, and looked towards Dickson.

"Sir Archibald's going to do his best for us," said that squire of dames. "I was telling him that we had had our breakfast."

"Let's get out of this sepulchre," said their host, who was recovering himself. "There's a roasting fire in my den. Of course you'll have something to eat—hot coffee, anyhow—I've trained my cook to make coffee like a Frenchwoman. The housekeeper will take charge of you, if you want to tidy up, and you must excuse our ramshackle ways, please. I don't believe there's ever been a lady in this house before, you know."

He led her to the smoking-room and ensconced her in the great chair by the fire. Smilingly she refused a series of offers which ranged from a sheepskin mantle which he had got in the Pamirs and which he thought might fit her, to hot whisky and water as a specific against a chill. But she accepted a pair of slippers and deftly kicked off the brogues provided by Mrs. Morran. Also, while Dickson started rapaciously on a second breakfast, she allowed him to pour her out a cup of coffee.

"You are a soldier?" she asked.

"Two years infantry—5th Battalion Lennox Highlanders, and then Flying Corps. Top-hole time I had too, till the day before the Armistice when my luck gave out and I took a nasty toss. Consequently I'm not as fast on my legs now as I'd like to be."

"You were a friend of Captain Kennedy?"

"His oldest. We were at the same private school, and he was at m' tutor's, and we were never much separated till he went abroad to cram for the Diplomatic and I started east to shoot things."

"Then I will tell you what I told Captain Kennedy." Saskia, looking into the heart of the peats, began the story of which we have already heard a version, but she told it differently, for she was telling it to one who more or less belonged to her own world. She mentioned names at which the other nodded. She spoke of a certain Paul Abreskov. "I heard of him at Bokhara in 1912," said Sir Archie, and his face grew solemn. Sometimes she lapsed into French, and her hearer's brow wrinkled, but

he appeared to follow. When she had finished he drew a long breath.

"My Aunt! What a time you've been through! I've seen pluck in my day, but yours! It's not thinkable. D'you mind if I ask a question, Princess? Bolshevism we know all about, and I admit Trotsky and his friends are a pretty effective push; but how on earth have they got a world-wide graft going in the time so that they can stretch their net to an out-of-the-way spot like this? It looks as if they had struck a Napoleon somewhere."

"You do not understand," she said. "I cannot make any one understand—except a Russian. My country has been broken to pieces, and there is no law in it; therefore it is a nursery of crime. So would England be, or France, if you had suffered the same misfortunes. My people are not wickeder than others, but for the moment they are sick and have no strength. As for the government of the Bolsheviks it matters little, for it will pass. Some parts of it may remain, but it is a government of the sick and fevered, and cannot endure in health. Lenin may be a good man—I do not think so, but I do not know—but if he were an archangel he could not alter things. Russia is mortally sick and therefore all evil is unchained, and the criminals have no one to check them. There is crime everywhere in the world, and the unfettered crime in Russia is so powerful that it stretches its hand to crime throughout the globe and there is a great mobilising everywhere of wicked men. Once you boasted that law was international and that the

police in one land worked with the police of all others. To-day that is true about criminals. After a war evil passions are loosed, and, since Russia is broken, in her they can make their headquarters. . . . It is not Bolshevism, the theory, you need fear, for that is a weak and dying thing. It is crime, which to-day finds its seat in my country, but is not only Russian. It has no fatherland. It is as old as human nature and as wide as the earth."

"I see," said Sir Archie. "Gad, here have I been vegetatin' and thinkin' that all excitement had gone out of life with the war, and sometimes even regrettin' that the beastly old thing was over, and all the while the world fairly hummin' with interest. And Loudon too!"

"I would like your candid opinion on yon factor, Sir Archibald," said Dickson.

"I can't say I ever liked him, and I've once or twice had a row with him, for he used to bring his pals to shoot over Dalquharter and he didn't quite play the game by me. But I know dashed little about him, for I've been a lot away. Bit hairy about the heels, of course. A great figure at local race-meetin's, and used to toady old Carforth and the huntin' crowd. He has a pretty big reputation as a sharp lawyer and some of the thick-headed lairds swear by him, but Quentin never could stick him. It's quite likely he's been gettin' into Queer Street, for he was always speculatin' in horse-flesh, and I fancy he plunged a bit on the Turf. But I can't think how he got mixed up in this show."

"I'm positive Dobson's his brother."

"And put this business in his way. That would explain it all right. . . . He must be runnin' for pretty big stakes, for that kind of lad don't dabble in crime for six-and-eightpence. . . . Now for the layout. You've got three men shut up in Dalquharter House, who by this time have probably escaped. One of you—what's his name?—Heritage?—is in the old Tower, and you think that *they* think the Princess is still there and will sit round the place like terriers. Sometime to-day the Danish brig will arrive with reinforcements, and then there will be a hefty fight. Well, the first thing to be done is to get rid of Loudon's stymie with the authorities. Princess, I'm going to carry you off in my car to the Chief Constable. The second thing is for you after that to stay on here. It's a deadly place on a wet day, but it's safe enough."

Saskia shook her head and Dickson spoke for her.

"You'll no' get her to stop here. I've done my best, but she's determined to be back at Dalquharter. You see she's expecting a friend, and besides, if there's going to be a battle she'd like to be in it. Is that so, Mem?"

Sir Archie looked helplessly around him, and the sight of the girl's face convinced him that argument would be fruitless. "Anyhow she must come with me to the Chief Constable. Lethington's a slow bird on the wing, and I don't see myself convincin' him that he must get busy unless I can produce the Princess. Even then it may be a tough job, for it's Sunday, and in these parts people go to sleep till Monday mornin'."

"That's just what I'm trying to get at," said Dickson. "By all means go to the Chief Constable, and tell him it's life or death. My lawyer in Glasgow, Mr. Caw, will have been stirring him up yesterday, and you two should complete the job. . . . But what I'm feared is that he'll not be in time. As you say, it's the Sabbath day, and the police are terrible slow. Now any moment that brig may be here, and the trouble will start. I'm wanting to save the Princess, but I'm wanting too to give these blagiyards the roughest handling they ever got in their lives. Therefore I say there's no time to lose. We're far ower few to put up a fight, and we want every man you've got about this place to hold the fort till the police come."

Sir Archibald looked upon the earnest flushed face of Dickson with admiration. "I'm blessed if you're not the most whole-hearted brigand I've ever struck."

"I'm not. I'm just a business man."

"Do you realise that you're levying a private war and breaking every law of the land?"

"Hoots!" said Dickson. "I don't care a docken about the law. I'm for seeing this job through. What force can you produce?"

"Only cripples, I'm afraid. There's Sime, my butler. He was a Fusilier Jock and, as you saw, has lost an arm. Then McGuffog the keeper is a good man, but he's still got a Turkish bullet in his thigh. The chauffeur, Carfrae, was in the Yeomanry, and lost half a foot, and there's myself, as lame as a duck. The herds on the home farm are

no good, for one's seventy and the other is in bed with jaundice. The Mains can produce four men, but they're rather a job lot."

"They'll do fine," said Dickson heartily. "All sodgers, and no doubt all good shots. Have you plenty guns?"

Sir Archie burst into uproarious laughter. "Mr. McCunn, you're a man after my own heart. I'm under your orders. If I had a boy I'd put him into the provision trade, for it's the place to see fightin'. Yes, we've no end of guns. I advise shot-guns, for they've more stoppin' power in a rush than a rifle, and I take it it's a rough-and-tumble we're lookin' for."

"Right," said Dickson. "I saw a bicycle in the hall. I want you to lend it me, for I must be getting back. You'll take the Princess and do the best you can with the Chief Constable."

"And then?"

"Then you'll load up your car with your folk, and come down the hill to Dalquharter. There'll be a laddie, or maybe more than one, waiting for you on this side the village to give you instructions. Take your orders from them. If it's a red-haired ruffian called Dougal you'll be wise to heed what he says, for he has a grand head for battles."

Five minutes later Dickson was pursuing a quavering course like a snipe down the avenue. He was a miserable performer on a bicycle. Not for twenty years had he bestridden one, and he did not understand such new devices as free-wheels and change of gears. The mounting had been the worst part

and it had only been achieved by the help of a rockery. He had begun by cutting into two flower-beds, and missing a birch tree by inches. But he clung on desperately, well knowing that if he fell off it would be hard to remount, and at length he gained the avenue. When he passed the lodge gates he was riding fairly straight, and when he turned off the Ayr highway to the side road that led to Dalquharter he was more or less master of his machine.

He crossed the Garple by an ancient hunch-backed bridge, observing even in his absorption with the handle-bars that the stream was in roaring spate. He wrestled up the further hill, with aching calf-muscles, and got to the top just before his strength gave out. Then as the road turned seaward he had the slope with him, and enjoyed some respite. It was no case for putting up his feet, for the gale was blowing hard on his right cheek, but the downward grade enabled him to keep his course with little exertion. His anxiety to get back to the scene of action was for the moment appeased, since he knew he was making as good speed as the weather allowed, so he had leisure for thought.

But the mind of this preposterous being was not on the business before him. He dallied with irrelevant things—with the problems of youth and love. He was beginning to be very nervous about Heritage, not as the solitary garrison of the old Tower, but as the lover of Saskia. That everybody should be in love with her appeared to him only proper, for he had never met her like, and assumed that it

did not exist. The desire of the moth for the star seemed to him a reasonable thing, since hopeless loyalty and unrequited passion were the eternal stock-in-trade of romance. He wished he were twenty-five himself to have the chance of indulging in such sentimentality for such a lady. But Heritage was not like him and would never be content with a romantic folly. . . . He had been in love with her for two years—a long time. He spoke about wanting to die for her, which was a flight beyond Dickson himself. "I doubt it will be what they call a 'grand passion,' " he reflected with reverence. But it was hopeless; he saw quite clearly that it was hopeless.

Why, he could not have explained, for Dickson's instincts were subtler than his intelligence. He recognised that the two belonged to different circles of being, which nowhere intersected. That mysterious lady, whose eyes had looked through life to the other side, was no mate for the Poet. His faithful soul was agitated, for he had developed for Heritage a sincere affection. It would break his heart, poor man. There was he holding the fort alone and cheering himself with delightful fancies about one remoter than the moon. Dickson wanted happy endings, and here there was no hope of such. He hated to admit that life could be crooked, but the optimist in him was now fairly dashed.

Sir Archie might be the fortunate man, for of course he would soon be in love with her, if he were not so already. Dickson like all his class had a pro-

found regard for the country gentry. The business Scot does not usually revere wealth, though he may pursue it earnestly, nor does he specially admire rank in the common sense. But for ancient race he has respect in his bones, though it may happen that in public he denies it, and the laird has for him a secular association with good family. . . . Sir Archie might do. He was young, good-looking, obviously gallant. . . . But no! He was not quite right either. Just a trifle too light in weight, too boyish and callow. The Princess must have youth, but it should be mighty youth, the youth of a Napoleon or a Cæsar. He reflected that the Great Montrose, for whom he had a special veneration, might have filled the bill. Or young Harry with his beaver up? Or Claverhouse in the picture with the flush of temper on his cheek?

The meditations of the match-making Dickson came to an abrupt end. He had been riding negligently, his head bent against the wind, and his eyes vaguely fixed on the wet hill-gravel of the road. Of his immediate environs he was pretty well unconscious. Suddenly he was aware of figures on each side of him who advanced menacingly. Stung to activity he attempted to increase his pace, which was already good, for the road at this point descended steeply. Then, before he could prevent it, a stick was thrust into his front wheel, and the next second he was describing a curve through the air. His head took the ground, he felt a spasm of blinding pain, and then a sense of horrible suffocation before his wits left him.

"Are ye sure it's the richt man, Ecky?" said a voice which he did not hear.

"Sure. It's the Glesca body Dobson telled us to look for yesterday. It's a pund note atween us for this job. We'll tie him up in the wud till we've time to attend to him."

"Is he bad?"

"It doesna maitter," said the one called Ecky. "He'll be deid onyway long afore the morn."

Mrs. Morran all forenoon was in a state of un-Sabbatical disquiet. After she had seen Saskia and Dickson start she finished her housewifely duties, took Cousin Eugénie her breakfast, and made preparation for the midday dinner. The invalid in the bed in the parlour was not a repaying subject. Cousin Eugénie belonged to that type of elderly women who, having been spoiled in youth, find the rest of life fall far short of their expectations. Her voice had acquired a perpetual wail, and the corners of what had once been a pretty mouth drooped in an eternal peevishness. She found herself in a morass of misery and shabby discomfort, but had her days continued in an even tenor she would still have lamented. "A dingy body," was Mrs. Morran's comment, but she laboured in kindness. Unhappily they had no common language, and it was only by signs that the hostess could discover her wants and show her goodwill. She fed her and bathed her face, saw to the fire and left her to sleep. "I'm boilin' a hen to mak' broth for your denner, Mem. Try and get

a bit sleep now." The purport of the advice was clear, and Cousin Eugénie turned obediently on her pillow.

It was Mrs. Morran's custom of a Sunday to spend the morning in devout meditation. Some years before she had given up tramping the five miles to kirk, on the ground that having been a regular attendant for fifty years she had got all the good out of it that was probable. Instead she read slowly aloud to herself the sermon printed in a certain religious weekly which reached her every Saturday, and concluded with a chapter or two of the Bible. But to-day something had gone wrong with her mind. She could not follow the thread of the Reverend Doctor MacMichael's discourse. She could not fix her attention on the wanderings and misdeeds of Israel as recorded in the Book of Exodus. She must always be getting up to look at the pot on the fire, or to open the back door and study the weather. For a little she fought against her unrest, and then she gave up the attempt at concentration. She took the big pot off the fire and allowed it to simmer, and presently she fetched her boots and umbrella, and kilted her petticoats. "I'll be none the waur o' a breath o' caller air," she decided.

The wind was blowing great guns but there was only the thinnest sprinkle of rain. Sitting on the hen-house roof and munching a raw turnip was a figure which she recognised as the smallest of the Die-Hards. Between bites he was singing dolefully

to the tune of "Annie Laurie" one of the ditties of his quondam Sunday school:

"The Boorjoys' brays are bonny,
Too-roo-ra-roo-raloo,
But the Worrkers o' the Worrl'd
Wull gar them a' look blue,
Wull gar them a' look blue,
And droon them in the sea,
And—for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'll lay me down and dee."

"Losh, laddie," she cried, "that's cauld food for the stamach. Come indoors about midday and I'll gie ye a plate o' broth!" The Die-Hard saluted and continued on the turnip.

She took the Auchenlochan road across the Garple bridge, for that was the best road to the Mains and by it Dickson and the others might be returning. Her equanimity at all seasons was like a Turk's, and she would not have admitted that anything mortal had power to upset or excite her: nevertheless it was a fast-beating heart that she now bore beneath her Sunday jacket. Great events, she felt, were on the eve of happening, and of them she was a part. Dickson's anxiety was hers, to bring things to a business-like conclusion. The honour of Huntingtower was at stake and of the old Kennedys. She was carrying out Mr. Quentin's commands, the dead boy who used to clamour for her treacle scones. And there was more than duty

in it, for youth was not dead in her old heart, and adventure had still power to quicken it.

Mrs. Morran walked well, with the steady long paces of the Scots countrywoman. She left the Auchenlochan road and took the side path along the tableland to the Mains. But for the surge of the gale and the far-borne boom of the furious sea there was little noise; not a bird cried in the uneasy air. With the wind behind her Mrs. Morran breasted the ascent till she had on her right the moorland running south to the Lochan valley and on her left Garple chafing in its deep forested gorges. Her eyes were quick and she noted with interest a weasel creeping from a fern-clad cairn. A little way on she passed an old ewe in difficulties and assisted it to rise. "But for me, my wumman, ye'd hae been braxy ere nicht," she told it as it departed bleating. Then she realised that she had come a certain distance. "Losh, I maun be gettin' back or the hen will be spiled," she cried, and was on the verge of turning.

But something caught her eye a hundred yards further on the road. It was something which moved with the wind like a wounded bird, fluttering from the roadside to a puddle and then back to the rushes. She advanced to it, missed it, and caught it.

It was an old dingy green felt hat, and she recognised it as Dickson's.

Mrs. Morran's brain, after a second of confusion, worked fast and clearly. She examined the road and saw that a little way on the gravel had been violently agitated. She detected several prints

of hobnailed boots. There were prints too, on a patch of peat on the south side behind a tall bank of sods. "That's where they were hidin'," she concluded. Then she explored on the other side in a thicket of hazels and wild raspberries, and presently her perseverance was rewarded. The scrub was all crushed and pressed as if several persons had been forcing a passage. In a hollow was a gleam of something white. She moved towards it with a quaking heart, and was relieved to find that it was only a new and expensive bicycle with the front wheel badly buckled.

Mrs. Morran delayed no longer. If she had walked well on her out journey, she beat all records on the return. Sometimes she would run till her breath failed; then she would slow down till anxiety once more quickened her pace. To her joy on the Dalquharter side of the Garple bridge she observed the figure of a Die-Hard. Breathless, flushed, with her bonnet awry and her umbrella held like a scimitar, she seized on the boy.

"Awfu' doin's! They've grippit Maister McCunn up the Mains road just afore the second milestone and forenent the auld bucht. I fund his hat, and a bicycle's lyin' broken in the wud. Haste ye, man, and get the rest and awa' and seek him. It'll be the tinklers frae the Dean. I'd gang mysel', but my legs are ower auld. Oh, laddie, dinna stop to speir questions. They'll hae him murdered or awa' to sea. And maybe the led dy was wi' him and they've got them baith. Wae's me! Wae's me!"

The Die-Hard, who was Wee Jaikie, did not

delay. His eyes had filled with tears at her news, which we know to have been his habit. When Mrs. Morran, after indulging in a moment of barbaric keening, looked back the road she had come, she saw a small figure trotting up the hill like a terrier who has been left behind. As he trotted he wept bitterly. Jaikie was getting dangerous.

CHAPTER XII

HOW MR. McCUNN COMMITTED AN ASSAULT UPON AN ALLY

DICKSON always maintained that his senses did not leave him for more than a second or two, but he admitted that he did not remember very clearly the events of the next few hours. He was conscious of a bad pain above his eyes, and something wet trickling down his cheek. There was a perpetual sound of water in his ears and of men's voices. He found himself dropped roughly on the ground and forced to walk, and was aware that his legs were inclined to wobble. Somebody had a grip on each arm, so that he could not defend his face from the brambles, and that worried him, for his whole head seemed one aching bruise and he dreaded anything touching it. But all the time he did not open his mouth, for silence was the one duty that his muddled wits enforced. He felt that he was not the master of his mind, and he dreaded what he might disclose if he began to babble.

Presently there came a blank space of which he had no recollection at all. The movement had stopped, and he was allowed to sprawl on the ground. He thought that his head had got another whack from a bough, and that the pain put him into a stupor. When he awoke he was alone.

He discovered that he was strapped very tightly

to a young Scotch fir. His arms were bent behind him and his wrists tied together with cords knotted at the back of the tree; his legs were shackled, and further cords fastened them to the bole. Also there was a halter round the trunk and just under his chin, so that while he breathed freely enough, he could not move his head. Before him was a tangle of bracken and scrub, and beyond that the gloom of dense pines; but as he could only see directly in front his prospect was strictly circumscribed.

Very slowly he began to take his bearings. The pain in his head was now dulled and quite bearable, and the flow of blood had stopped, for he felt the incrustation of it beginning on his cheeks. There was a tremendous noise all around him, and he traced this to the swaying of tree-tops in the gale. But there was an undercurrent of deeper sound—water surely, water churning among rocks. It was a stream—the Garple of course—and then he remembered where he was and what had happened.

I do not wish to portray Dickson as a hero, for nothing would annoy him more; but I am bound to say that his first clear thought was not of his own danger. It was intense exasperation at the miscarriage of his plans. Long ago he should have been with Dougal arranging operations, giving him news of Sir Archie, finding out how Heritage was faring, deciding how to use the coming reinforcements. Instead he was trussed up in a wood, a prisoner of the enemy, and utterly useless to his side. He tugged at his bonds, and nearly throttled

himself. But they were of good tarry cord and did not give a fraction of an inch. Tears of bitter rage filled his eyes and made furrows on his encrusted cheeks. Idiot that he had been, he had wrecked everything! What would Saskia and Dougal and Sir Archie do without a business man by their side? There would be a muddle, and the little party would walk into a trap. He saw it all very clearly. The men from the sea would overpower them, there would be murder done, and an easy capture of the Princess; and the police would turn up at long last to find an empty headland.

He had also most comprehensively wrecked himself, and at the thought the most genuine panic seized him. There was no earthly chance of escape, for he was tucked away in this infernal jungle till such time as his enemies had time to deal with him. As to what that dealing would be like he had no doubts, for they knew that he had been their chief opponent. Those desperate ruffians would not scruple to put an end to him. His mind dwelt with horrible fascination upon throat-cutting, no doubt because of the presence of the cord below his chin. He had heard it was not a painful death; at any rate he remembered a clerk he had once had, a feeble, timid creature, who had twice attempted suicide that way. Surely it could not be very bad, and it would soon be over.

But another thought came to him. They would carry him off in the ship and settle with him at their leisure. No swift merciful death for him. He had read dreadful tales of the Bolsheviks' skill in tor-

ture, and now they all came back to him—stories of Chinese mercenaries, and men buried alive, and death by agonising inches. He felt suddenly very cold and sick, and hung in his bonds for he had no strength in his limbs. Then the pressure on his throat braced him, and also quickened his numb mind. The liveliest terror ran like quicksilver through his veins.

He endured some moments of this anguish, till after many despairing clutches at his wits he managed to attain a measure of self-control. He certainly wasn't going to allow himself to become mad. Death was death whatever form it took, and he had to face death as many better men had done before him. He had often thought about it and wondered how he should behave if the thing came to him. Respectably, he had hoped; heroically, he had sworn in his moments of confidence. But he had never for an instant dreamed of this cold, lonely, dreadful business. Last Sunday, he remembered, he had been basking in the afternoon sun in his little garden and reading about the end of Fergus MacIvor in *Waverley* and thrilling to the romance of it; and then Tibby had come out and summoned him in to tea. Then he had rather wanted to be a Jacobite in the '45 and in peril of his neck, and now Providence had taken him most terribly at his word.

A week ago——! He groaned at the remembrance of that sunny garden. In seven days he had found a new world and tried a new life, and had come now to the end of it. He did not want to die,

less now than ever with such wide horizons opening before him. But that was the worst of it, he reflected, for to have a great life great hazards must be taken, and there was always the risk of this sudden extinguisher. . . . Had he to choose again, far better the smooth sheltered bypath than this accursed romantic highway on to which he had blundered. . . . No, by Heaven, no! Confound it, if he had to choose he would do it all again. Something stiff and indomitable in his soul was bracing him to a manlier humour. There was no one to see the figure strapped to the fir, but had there been a witness he would have noted that at this stage Dickson shut his teeth and that his troubled eyes looked very steadily before him.

His business, he felt, was to keep from thinking, for if he thought at all there would be a flow of memories, of his wife, his home, his books, his friends, to unman him. So he steeled himself to blankness, like a sleepless man imagining white sheep in a gate. . . . He noted a robin below the hazels, strutting impudently. And there was a tit on a bracken frond, which made the thing sway like one of the see-saws he used to play with as a boy. There was no wind in that undergrowth, and any movement must be due to bird or beast. The tit flew off, and the oscillations of the bracken slowly died away. Then they began again, but more violently, and Dickson could not see the bird that caused them. It must be something down at the roots of the covert, a rabbit, perhaps, or a fox, or a weasel.

He watched for the first sign of the beast, and thought he caught a glimpse of tawny fur. Yes, there it was—pale dirty yellow, a weasel clearly. Then suddenly the patch grew larger, and to his amazement he looked at a human face—the face of a pallid small boy.

A head disentangled itself, followed by thin shoulders, and then by a pair of very dirty bare legs. The figure raised itself and looked sharply round to make certain that the coast was clear. Then it stood up and saluted, revealing the well-known lineaments of Wee Jaikie.

At the sight Dickson knew that he was safe by that certainty of instinct which is independent of proof, like the man who prays for a sign and has his prayer answered. He observed that the boy was quietly sobbing. Jaikie surveyed the position for an instant with red-rimmed eyes and then unclasped a knife, feeling the edge of the blade on his thumb. He darted behind the fir, and a second later Dickson's wrists were free. Then he sawed at the legs, and cut the shackles which tied them together, and then—most circumspectly—assaulted the cord which bound Dickson's neck to the trunk. There now remained only the two bonds which fastened the legs and the body to the tree.

There was a sound in the wood different from the wind and stream. Jaikie listened like a startled hind.

"They're comin' back," he gasped. "Just you bide where ye are and let on ye're still tied up."

He disappeared in the scrub as inconspicuously as

a rat, while two of the tinklers came up the slope from the waterside. Dickson in a fever of impatience cursed Wee Jaikie for not cutting his remaining bonds so that he could at least have made a dash for freedom. And then he realised that the boy had been right. Feeble and cramped as he was, he would have stood no chance in a race.

One of the tinklers was the man called Ecky. He had been running hard, and was mopping his brow.

"Hob's seen the brig," he said. "It's droppin' anchor ayont the Dookits whaur there's a beild frae the wund and deep water. They'll be landit in half an 'oor. Awa' you up to the Hoose and tell Dobson, and me and Sim and Hob will meet the boats at the Garplefit."

The other cast a glance towards Dickson.

"What about him?" he asked.

The two scrutinised their prisoner from a distance of a few paces. Dickson, well aware of his peril, held himself as stiff as if every bond had been in place. The thought flashed on him that if he were too immobile they might think he was dying or dead, and come close to examine him. If they only kept their distance, the dusk of the wood would prevent them detecting Jaikie's handiwork.

"What'll you take to let me go?" he asked plaintively.

"Naething that you could offer, my mannie," said Ecky.

"I'll give you a five-pound note apiece."

"Produce the siller," said the other.

"It's in my pocket."

"It's no' that. We riped your pooches lang syne."

"I'll take you to Glasgow with me and pay you there. Honour bright."

Ecky spat. "D'ye think we're gowks? Man, there's no siller ye could pay wad mak' it worth our while to lowse ye. Bide quiet there and ye'll see some queer things ere nicht. C'way, Davie."

The two set off at a good pace down the stream, while Dickson's pulsing heart returned to its normal rhythm. As the sound of their feet died away Wee Jaikie crawled out from cover, dry-eyed now and very business-like. He slit the last thongs, and Dickson fell limply on his face.

"Losh, laddie, I'm awful stiff," he groaned. "Now, listen. Away all your pith to Dougal, and tell him that the brig's in and the men will be landing inside the hour. Tell him I'm coming as fast as my legs will let me. The Princess will likely be there already and Sir Archibald and his men, but if they're no', tell Dougal they're coming. Haste you, Jaikie. And see here, I'll never forget what you've done for me the day. You're a fine wee laddie!"

The obedient Die-Hard disappeared, and Dickson painfully and laboriously set himself to climb the slope. He decided that his quickest and safest route lay by the highroad, and he had also some hopes of recovering his bicycle. On examining his body he seemed to have sustained no very great damage, except a painful cramping of legs and

arms and a certain dizziness in the head. His pockets had been thoroughly rifled, and he reflected with amusement that he, the well-to-do Mr. McCunn, did not possess at the moment a single copper.

But his spirits were soaring, for somehow his escape had given him an assurance of ultimate success. Providence had directly interfered on his behalf by the hand of Wee Jaikie, and that surely meant that it would see him through. But his chief emotion was an ardour of impatience to get to the scene of action. He must be at Dalquharter before the men from the sea; he must find Dougal and discover his dispositions. Heritage would be on guard in the Tower and in a very little the enemy would be round it. It would be just like the Princess to try and enter there, but at all costs that must be hindered. She and Sir Archie must not be cornered in stone walls, but must keep their communications open and fall on the enemy's flank. Oh, if the police would only come in time, what a rounding-up of miscreants that day would see!

As the trees thinned on the brow of the slope and he saw the sky, he realised that the afternoon was far advanced. It must be well on for five o'clock. The wind still blew furiously, and the oaks on the fringes of the wood were whipped like saplings. Ruefully he admitted that the gale would not defeat the enemy. If the brig found a sheltered anchorage on the south side of the headland beyond the Garple, it would be easy enough for boats to make the Garple mouth, though it might be a difficult job to get out again. The thought quickened his steps,

and he came out of cover on to the public road without a prior reconnaissance.

Just in front of him stood a motor-bicycle. Something had gone wrong with it for its owner was tinkering at it, on the side farthest from Dickson. A wild hope seized him that this might be the vanguard of the police, and he went boldly towards it. The owner, who was kneeling, raised his face at the sound of footsteps and Dickson looked into his eyes.

He recognised them only too well. They belonged to the man he had seen in the inn at Kirk-michael, the man whom Heritage had decided was an Australian, but whom they now knew to be their arch-enemy—the man called Paul who had persecuted the Princess for years and whom alone of all beings on earth she feared. He had been expected before, but had arrived now in the nick of time while the brig was casting anchor. Saskia had said that he had a devil's brain, and Dickson, as he stared at him, saw a fiendish cleverness in his straight brows and a remorseless cruelty in his stiff jaw and his pale eyes.

He achieved the bravest act of his life. Shaky and dizzy as he was, with freedom newly opened to him and the mental torments of his captivity still an awful recollection, he did not hesitate. He saw before him the villain of the drama, the one man that stood between the Princess and peace of mind. He regarded no consequences, gave no heed to his own fate, and thought only how to put his enemy out of action. There was a big spanner lying on

the ground. He seized it and with all his strength smote at the man's face.

The motor-cyclist, kneeling and working hard at his machine, had raised his head at Dickson's approach and beheld a wild apparition—a short man in ragged tweeds, with a bloody brow and long smears of blood on his cheeks. The next second he observed the threat of attack, and ducked his head so that the spanner only grazed his scalp. The motor-bicycle toppled over, its owner sprang to his feet, and found the short man, very pale and gasping, about to renew the assault. In such a crisis there was no time for inquiry, and the cyclist was well trained in self-defence. He leaped the prostrate bicycle, and before his assailant could get in a blow brought his left fist into violent contact with his chin. Dickson tottered back a step or two and then subsided among the bracken.

He did not lose his senses, but he had no more strength in him. He felt horribly ill, and struggled in vain to get up. The cyclist, a gigantic figure, towered above him. "Who the devil are you?" he was asking. "What do you mean by it?"

Dickson had no breath for words, and knew that if he tried to speak he would be very sick. He could only stare up like a dog at the angry eyes. Angry beyond question they were, but surely not malevolent. Indeed, as they looked at the shameful figure on the ground, amusement filled them. The face relaxed into a smile.

"Who on earth are you?" the voice repeated. And then into it came recognition. "I've seen you

before. I believe you're the little man I saw last week at the Black Bull. Be so good as to explain why you want to murder me?"

Explanation was beyond Dickson, but his conviction was being wofully shaken. Saskia had said her enemy was as beautiful as a devil—he remembered the phrase, for he had thought it ridiculous. This man was magnificent, but there was nothing devilish in his lean grave face.

"What's your name?" the voice was asking.

"Tell me yours first," Dickson essayed to stutter between spasms of nausea.

"My name is Alexander Nicholson," was the answer.

"Then you're no' the man." It was a cry of wrath and despair.

"You're a very desperate little chap. For whom had I the honour to be mistaken?"

Dickson had now wriggled into a sitting position and had clasped his hands above his aching head.

"I thought you were a Russian, name of Paul," he groaned.

"Paul! Paul who?"

"Just Paul. A Bolshevik and an awful bad lot."

Dickson could not see the change which his words wrought in the other's face. He found himself picked up in strong arms and carried to a bog-pool where his battered face was carefully washed, his throbbing brows laved, and a wet handkerchief bound over them. Then he was given brandy in the socket of a flask, which eased his nausea. The cyclist ran his bicycle to the roadside, and found

a seat for Dickson behind the turf-dyke of the old bucht.

"Now you are going to tell me everything," he said. "If the Paul who is your enemy is the Paul I think him, then we are allies."

But Dickson did not need this assurance. His mind had suddenly received a revelation. The Princess had expected an enemy, but also a friend. Might not this be the long-awaited friend, for whose sake she was rooted to Huntingtower with all its terrors?

"Are you sure you name's no' Alexis?" he asked.

"In my own country I was called Alexis Nicolae-vitch, for I am a Russian. But for some years I have made my home with your folk, and I call myself Alexander Nicholson, which is the English form. Who told you about Alexis?"

"Give me your hand," said Dickson shamefacedly. "Man, she's been looking for you for weeks. You're terribly behind the fair."

"She!" he cried. "For God's sake tell me all you know."

"Ay, she—the Princess. But what are we haver-ing here for? I tell you at this moment she's somewhere down about the old Tower, and there's boat-loads of blagyirds landing from the sea. Help me up, man, for I must be off. The story will keep. Losh, it's very near the darkening. If you're Alexis, you're just about in time for a battle."

But Dickson on his feet was but a frail creature. He was still deplorably giddy, and his legs showed an unpleasing tendency to crumple. "I'm fair

done," he moaned. "You see, I've been tied up all day to a tree and had two sore bashes on my head. Get you on that bicycle and hurry on, and I'll hirple after you the best I can. I'll direct you the road, and if you're lucky you'll find a Die-Hard about the village. Away with you, man, and never mind me."

"We go together," said the other quietly. "You can sit behind me and hang on to my waist. Before you turned up I had pretty well got the thing in order."

Dickson in a fever of impatience sat by while the Russian put the finishing touches to the machine, and as well as his anxiety allowed put him in possession of the main facts of the story. He told of how he and Heritage had come to Dalquharter, of the first meeting with Saskia, of the trip to Glasgow with the jewels, of the exposure of Loudon the factor, of last night's doings in the House, and of the journey that morning to the Mains of Garple. He sketched the figures on the scene—Heritage and Sir Archie, Dobson and his gang, the Gorbals Die-Hards. He told of the enemy's plans so far as he knew them.

"Looked at from a business point of view," he said, "the situation's like this. There's Heritage in the Tower, with Dobson, Léon and Spidel sitting round him. Somewhere about the place there's the Princess and Sir Archibald and three men with guns from the Mains. Dougal and his five laddies are running loose in the policies. And there's four tinklers and God knows how many foreign ruffians

pushing up from the Garplefoot, and a brig lying waiting to carry off the ladies. Likewise there's the police, somewhere on the road, though the dear kens when they'll turn up. It's awful the incompetence of our Government, and the rates and taxes that high! . . . And there's you and me by this roadside, and I'm no more use than a tattie-bogle. . . . That's the situation, and the question is what's our plan to be? We must keep the blagyirds in play till the police come, and at the same time we must keep the Princess out of danger. That's why I'm wanting back, for they've sore need of a business head. Yon Sir Archibald's a fine fellow, but I doubt he'll be a bit rash, and the Princess is no' to hold or bind. Our first job is to find Dougal and get a grip of the facts."

"I am going to the Princess," said the Russian.

"Ay, that'll be best. You'll be maybe able to manage her, for you'll be well acquaint."

"She is my kinswoman. She is also my affianced wife."

"Keep us!" Dickson exclaimed, with a doleful thought of Heritage. "What ailed you then no' to look after her better?"

"We have been long separated, because it was her will. She had work to do and disappeared from me, though I searched all Europe for her. Then she sent me word, when the danger became extreme, and summoned me to her aid. But she gave me poor directions, for she did not know her own plans very clearly. She spoke of a place called Dark-water, and I have been hunting half Scotland for it.

It was only last night that I heard of Dalquharter and guessed that that might be the name. But I was far down in Galloway, and have ridden fifty miles to-day."

"It's a queer thing, but I wouldn't take you for a Russian."

Alexis finished his work and put away his tools. "For the present," he said, "I am an Englishman, till my country comes again to her senses. Ten years ago I left Russia, for I was sick of the foolishness of my class and wanted a free life in a new world. I went to Australia and made good as an engineer. I am a partner in a firm which is pretty well known even in Britain. When war broke out I returned to fight for my people, and when Russia fell out of the war, I joined the Australians in France and fought with them till the Armistice. And now I have only one duty left, to save the Princess and take her with me to my new home till Russia is a nation once more."

Dickson whistled joyfully. "So Mr. Heritage was right. He aye said you were an Australian. . . . And you're a business man! That's grand hearing and puts my mind at rest. You must take charge of the party at the House, for Sir Archibald's a daft young lad and Mr. Heritage is a poet. I thought I would have to go myself, but I doubt I would just be a hindrance with my dwaibly legs. I'd be better outside, watching for the police. . . . Are you ready, sir?"

Dickson not without difficulty perched himself astride the luggage carrier, firmly grasping the

rider round the middle. The machine started, but it was evidently in a bad way, for it made poor going till the descent towards the main Auchenlochan road. On the slope it warmed up and they crossed the Garple bridge at a fair pace. There was to be no pleasant April twilight, for the stormy sky had already made dusk, and in a very little the dark would fall. So sombre was the evening that Dickson did not notice a figure in the shadow of the roadside pines till it whistled shrilly on its fingers. He cried on Alexis to stop, and, this being accomplished with some suddenness, fell off at Dougal's feet.

"What's the news?" he demanded.

Dougal glanced at Alexis and seemed to approve his looks.

"Napoleon has just reported that three boatloads, making either twenty-three or twenty-four men—they were gey ill to count—has landed at Garplefit and is makin' their way to the auld Tower. The tinklers warned Dobson and soon it'll be a' bye wi' Heritage."

"The Princess is not there?" was Dickson's anxious inquiry.

"Na, na. Heritage is there his lone. They were for joinin' him, but I wouldn't let them. She came wi' a man they call Sir Erchibald and three gem-keepers wi' guns. I stoppit their caw'r up the road and tell't them the lie o' the land. Yon Sir Erchibald has poor notions o' strawtegy. He was for bangin' into the auld Tower straight away and shootin' Dobson if he tried to stop them. 'Havers,'

say I, 'let them break their teeth on the Tower, thinkin' the leddy's inside, and that'll give us time, for Heritage is no' the lad to surrender in a hurry.' "

"Where are they now?"

"In the Hoose o' Dalquharter, and a sore job I had gettin' them in. We've shifted our base again, without the enemy suspectin'."

"Any word of the police?"

"The polis!" and Dougal spat cynically. "It seems they're a dour crop to shift. Sir Erchibald was sayin' that him and the lassie had been to the Chief Constable, but the man was terrible auld and slow. They convertit him, but he threepit that it would take a long time to collect his men and that there was no danger o' the brig landin' afore night. He's wrong there onyway, for they're landit."

"Dougal," said Dickson, "you've heard the Princess speak of a friend she was expecting here called Alexis. This is him. You can address him as Mr. Nicholson. Just arrived in the nick of time. You must get him into the House, for he's the best right to be beside the lady. . . . Jaikie would tell you that I've been sore mishandled the day, and am no' very fit for a battle. But Mr. Nicholson's a business man and he'll do as well. You're keeping the Die-Hards outside, I hope?"

"Ay. Thomas Yownie's in charge, and Jaikie will be in and out with orders. They've instructions to watch for the polis, and keep an eye on the Garplefit. It's a mortal long front to hold, but there's no other way. I must be in the Hoose

mysel'. Thomas Yownie's headquarters is the auld wife's hen-hoose."

At that moment in a pause of the gale came the far-borne echo of a shot.

"Pistol," said Alexis.

"Heritage," said Dougal. "Trade will be gettin' brisk with him. Start your machine and I'll hang on ahint. We'll try the road by the West Lodge."

Presently the pair disappeared in the dusk, the noise of the engine was swallowed up in the wild orchestra of the wind, and Dickson hobbled towards the village in a state of excitement which made him oblivious of his wounds. That lonely pistol shot was, he felt, the bell to ring up the curtain on the last act of the play.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COMING OF THE DANISH BRIG

MR. JOHN HERITAGE, solitary in the old Tower, found much to occupy his mind. His giddiness was passing, though the dregs of a headache remained, and his spirits rose with his responsibilities. At daybreak he breakfasted out of the Mearns Street provision box, and made tea in one of the Die-Hards' camp kettles. Next he gave some attention to his toilet, necessary after the rough-and-tumble of the night. He made shift to bathe in icy water from the Tower well, shaved, tidied up his clothes and found a clean shirt from his pack. He carefully brushed his hair, reminding himself that thus had the Spartans done before Thermopylæ. The neat and somewhat pallid young man that emerged from these rites then ascended to the first floor to reconnoitre the landscape from the narrow unglazed windows.

If any one had told him a week ago that he would be in so strange a world he would have quarrelled violently with his informant. A week ago he was a cynical clear-sighted modern, a contemner of illusions, a swallower of formulas, a breaker of shams—one who had seen through the heroical and found it silly. Romance and such-like toys were playthings for fatted middle-age, not for strenuous

and cold-eyed youth. But the truth was that now he was altogether spellbound by these toys. To think that he was serving his lady was rapture—ecstasy, that for her he was single-handed venturing all. He rejoiced to be alone with his private fancies. His one fear was that the part he had cast himself for should be needless, that the men from the sea should not come, or that reinforcements would arrive before he should be called upon. He hoped alone to make a stand against thousands. What the upshot might be he did not trouble to inquire. Of course the Princess would be saved, but first he must glut his appetite for the heroic.

He made a diary of events that day, just as he used to do at the front. At twenty minutes past eight he saw the first figure coming from the House. It was Spidel, who limped round the Tower, tried the door, and came to a halt below the window. Heritage stuck out his head and wished him good morning, getting in reply an amazed stare. The man was not disposed to talk, though Heritage made some interesting observations on the weather, but departed quicker than he came, in the direction of the West Lodge.

Just before nine o'clock he returned with Dobson and Léon. They made a very complete reconnaissance of the Tower, and for a moment Heritage thought that they were about to try to force an entrance. They tugged and hammered at the great oak door, which he had further strengthened by erecting behind it a pile of the heaviest lumber he could find in the place. It was imperative that they

should not get in, and he got Dickson's pistol ready with the firm intention of shooting them if necessary. But they did nothing, except to hold a conference in the hazel clump a hundred yards to the north, when Dobson seemed to be laying down the law, and Léon spoke rapidly with a great fluttering of hands. They were obviously puzzled by the sight of Heritage, whom they believed to have left the neighbourhood. Then Dobson went off, leaving Léon and Spidel on guard, one at the edge of the shrubberies between the Tower and the House, the other on the side nearest the Laver glen. These were their posts, but they did sentry-go around the building, and passed so close to Heritage's window that he could have tossed a cigarette on their heads.

It occurred to him that he ought to get busy with camouflage. They must be convinced that the Princess was in the place, for he wanted their whole mind to be devoted to the siege. He rummaged among the ladies' baggage, and extracted a skirt and a coloured scarf. The latter he managed to flutter so that it could be seen at the window the next time one of the watchers came within sight. He also fixed up the skirt so that the fringe of it could be seen, and, when Léon appeared below, he was in the shadow talking rapid French in a very fair imitation of the tones of Cousin Eugénie. The ruse had its effect, for Léon promptly went off to tell Spidel, and when Dobson appeared he too was given the news. This seemed to settle their plans, for all three remained on guard, Dobson nearest to the Tower, seated on an outcrop of rock with

his mackintosh collar turned up, and his eyes usually turned to the misty sea.

By this time it was eleven o'clock, and the next three hours passed slowly with Heritage. He fell to picturing the fortunes of his friends. Dickson and the Princess should by this time be far inland, out of danger and in the way of finding succour. He was confident that they would return, but he trusted not too soon, for he hoped for a run for his money as Horatius in the Gate. After that he was a little torn in his mind. He wanted the Princess to come back and to be somewhere near if there was a fight going, so that she might be a witness of his devotion. But she must not herself run any risk, and he became anxious when he remembered her terrible sangfroid. Dickson could no more restrain her than a child could hold a greyhound. . . . But of course it would never come to that. The police would turn up long before the brig appeared—Dougal had thought that would not be till high tide, between four and five—and the only danger would be to the pirates. The three watchers would be put in the bag, and the men from the sea would walk into a neat trap. This reflection seemed to take all the colour out of Heritage's prospect. Peril and heroism were not to be his lot—only boredom.

A little after twelve two of the tinklers appeared with some news which made Dobson laugh and pat them on the shoulder. He seemed to be giving them directions, pointing seaward and southward. He nodded to the Tower, where Heritage took the opportunity of again fluttering Saskia's scarf

athwart the window. The tinklers departed at a trot, and Dobson lit his pipe as if well pleased. He had some trouble with it in the wind, which had risen to an uncanny violence. Even the solid Tower rocked with it, and the sea was a waste of spindrift and low scurrying cloud. Heritage discovered a new anxiety—this time about the possibility of the brig landing at all. He wanted a complete bag, and it would be tragic if they got only the three seedy ruffians now circumambulating his fortress.

About one o'clock he was greatly cheered by the sight of Dougal. At the moment Dobson was lunching-off a hunk of bread and cheese directly between the Tower and the House, just short of the crest of the ridge on the other side of which lay the stables and the shrubberies; Léon was on the north side opposite the Tower door, and Spidel was at the south end near the edge of the Garple glen. Heritage, watching the ridge behind Dobson and the upper windows of the House which appeared over it, saw on the very crest something like a tuft of rusty bracken which he had not noticed before. Presently the tuft moved, and a hand shot up from it waving a rag of some sort. Dobson at the moment was engaged with a bottle of porter, and Heritage could safely wave a hand in reply. He could now make out clearly the red head of Dougal.

The Chieftain, having located the three watchers, proceeded to give an exhibition of his prowess for the benefit of the lonely inmate of the Tower. Using as cover a drift of bracken, he wormed his

way down till he was not six yards from Dobson, and Heritage had the privilege of seeing his grinning countenance a very little way above the inn-keeper's head. Then he crawled back and reached the neighbourhood of Léon, who was sitting on a fallen Scotch fir. At that moment it occurred to the Belgian to visit Dobson. Heritage's breath stopped, but Dougal was ready, and froze into a motionless blur in the shadow of a hazel bush. Then he crawled very fast into the hollow where Léon had been sitting, seized something which looked like a bottle, and scrambled back to the ridge. At the top he waved the object, whatever it was, but Heritage could not reply, for Dobson happened to be looking towards the window. That was the last he saw of the Chieftain, but presently he realised what was the booty he had annexed. It must be Léon's life-preserver, which the night before had broken Heritage's head.

After that cheering episode boredom again set in. He collected some food from the Mearns Street box, and indulged himself with a glass of liqueur brandy. He was beginning to feel miserably cold, so he carried up some broken wood and made a fire on the immense hearth in the upper chamber. Anxiety was clouding his mind again, for it was now two o'clock, and there was no sign of the reinforcements which Dickson and the Princess had gone to find. The minutes passed, and soon it was three o'clock, and from the window he saw only the top of the gaunt shuttered House, now and then hidden by squalls of sleet, and Dobson

squatted like an Eskimo, and trees dancing like a witch-wood in the gale. All the vigour of the morning seemed to have gone out of his blood; he felt lonely and apprehensive and puzzled. He wished he had Dickson beside him, for that little man's cheerful voice and complacent triviality would be a comfort. . . . Also, he was abominably cold. He put on his waterproof, and turned his attention to the fire. It needed re-kindling, and he hunted in his pockets for paper, finding only the slim volume lettered *Whorls*.

I set it down as the most significant commentary on his state of mind. He regarded the book with intense disfavour, tore it in two, and used a handful of its fine deckle-edged leaves to get the fire going. They burned well, and presently the rest followed. Well for Dickson's peace of mind that he was not a witness of such vandalism.

A little warmer but in no way more cheerful, he resumed his watch near the window. The day was getting darker, and promised an early dusk. His watch told him that it was after four, and still nothing had happened. Where on earth were Dickson and the Princess? Where in the name of all that was holy were the police? Any minute now the brig might arrive and land its men, and he would be left there as a burnt-offering to their wrath. There must have been an infernal muddle somewhere. . . . Anyhow the Princess was out of the trouble, but where the Lord alone knew. . . . Perhaps the reinforcements were lying in wait for the boats at the Garplefoot. That struck him as a likely ex-

planation, and comforted him. Very soon he might hear the sound of an engagement to the south, and the next thing would be Dobson and his crew in flight. He was determined to be in the show somehow and would be very close on their heels. He felt a peculiar dislike to all three, but especially to Léon. The Belgian's small baby features had for four days set him clenching his fists when he thought of them.

The next thing he saw was one of the tinklers running hard towards the Tower. He cried something to Dobson, which Heritage could not catch, but which woke the latter to activity. The innkeeper shouted to Léon and Spidel, and the tinkler was excitedly questioned. Dobson laughed and slapped his thigh. He gave orders to the others, and himself joined the tinkler and hurried off in the direction of the Garplefoot. Something was happening there, something of ill omen, for the man's face and manner had been triumphant. Were the boats landing?

As Heritage puzzled over this event, another figure appeared on the scene. It was a big man in knickerbockers and mackintosh, who came round the end of the House from the direction of the South Lodge. At first he thought it was the advance-guard from his own side, the help which Dickson had gone to find, and he only restrained himself in time from shouting a welcome. But surely their supports would not advance so confidently in enemy country. The man strode over the slopes as if looking for somebody; then he caught

sight of Léon and waved him to come. Léon must have known him, for he hastened to obey.

The two were about thirty yards from Heritage's window. Léon was telling some story volubly, pointing now to the Tower and now towards the sea. The big man nodded as if satisfied. Heritage noted that his right arm was tied up, and that the mackintosh sleeve was empty, and that brought him enlightenment. It was Loudon the factor, whom Dickson had winged the night before. The two of them passed out of view in the direction of Spidel.

The sight awoke Heritage to the supreme unpleasantness of his position. He was utterly alone on the headland, and his allies had vanished into space, while the enemy plans, moving like clock-work, were approaching their consummation. For a second he thought of leaving the Tower and hiding somewhere in the cliffs. He dismissed the notion unwillingly, for he remembered the task that had been set him. He was there to hold the fort to the last—to gain time, though he could not for the life of him see what use time was to be when all the strategy of his own side seemed to have miscarried. Anyhow, the blackguards would be sold for they would not find the Princess. But he felt a horrid void in the pit of his stomach, and a looseness about his knees.

The moments passed more quickly as he wrestled with his fears. The next he knew the empty space below his window was filling with figures. There was a great crowd of them, rough fellows with seamen's coats, still dripping as if they had had a wet

landing. Dobson was with them, but for the rest they were strange figures.

Now that the expected had come at last Heritage's nerves grew calmer. He made out that the newcomers were trying the door, and he waited to hear it fall, for such a mob could soon force it. But instead a voice called from beneath.

"Will you please open to us?" it said.

He stuck his head out and saw a little group with one man at the head of it, a young man clad in oil-skins whose face was dim in the murky evening. The voice was that of a gentleman.

"I have orders to open to no one," Heritage replied.

"Then I fear we must force an entrance," said the voice.

"You can go to the devil," said Heritage.

That defiance was the screw which his nerves needed. His temper had risen, he had forgotten all about the Princess, he did not even remember his isolation. His job was to make a fight for it. He ran up the staircase which led to the attics of the Tower, for he recollected that there was a window there which looked over the ground before the door. The place was ruinous, the floor filled with holes, and a part of the roof sagged down in a corner. The stones around the window were loose and crumbling and he managed to pull several out so that the slit was enlarged. He found himself looking down on a crowd of men, who had lifted the fallen tree on which Léon had perched, and were about to use it as a battering ram.

"The first fellow who comes within six yards of the door I shoot," he shouted.

There was a white wave below as every face was turned to him. He ducked back his head in time as a bullet chipped the side of the window.

But his position was a good one, for he had a hole in the broken wall through which he could see, and could shoot with his hand at the edge of the window while keeping his body in cover. The battering party resumed their task, and as the tree swung nearer, he fired at the foremost of them. He missed, but the shot for a moment suspended operations.

Again they came on, and again he fired. This time he damaged somebody, for the trunk was dropped.

A voice gave orders, a sharp authoritative voice. The battering squad dissolved, and there was a general withdrawal out of the line of fire from the window. Was it possible that he had intimidated them? He could hear the sound of voices, and then a single figure came into sight again, holding something in its hand.

He did not fire, for he recognised the futility of his efforts. The baseball swing of the figure below could not be mistaken. There was a roar beneath, and a flash of fire, as the bomb exploded on the door. Then came a rush of men, and the Tower had fallen.

Heritage clambered through a hole in the roof and gained the topmost parapet. He had still a pocketful of cartridges, and there in a coign of the

old battlements he would prove an ugly customer to the pursuit. Only one at a time could reach that siege perilous. . . . They would not take long to search the lower rooms, and then would be hot on the trail of the man who had fooled them. He had not a scrap of fear left or even of anger—only triumph at the thought of how properly those ruffians had been sold. “Like schoolboys they who unaware”—instead of two women they had found a man with a gun. And the Princess was miles off and forever beyond their reach. When they had settled with him they would no doubt burn the House down, but that would serve them little. From his airy pinnacle he could see the whole sea-front of Huntingtower, a blur in the dusk but for the ghostly eyes of its white-shuttered windows.

Something was coming from it, running lightly over the lawns, lost for an instant in the trees, and then appearing clear on the crest of the ridge where some hours earlier Dougal had lain. With horror he saw that it was a girl. She stood with the wind plucking at her skirts and hair, and she cried in a high, clear voice which pierced even the confusion of the gale. What she cried he could not tell for it was in a strange tongue. . . .

But it reached the besiegers. There was a sudden silence in the din below him and then a confusion of shouting. The men seemed to be pouring out of the gap which had been the doorway, and as he peered over the parapet first one and then another entered his area of vision. The girl on the ridge, as soon as she saw that she had attracted attention,

turned and ran back, and after her up the slopes went the pursuit bunched like hounds on a good scent.

Mr. John Heritage, swearing terribly, started to retrace his steps.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE CRUIVES

THE military historian must often make shift to write of battles with slender data, but he can pad out his deficiencies by learned parallels. If his were the talented pen describing this, the latest action fought on British soil against a foreign foe, he would no doubt be crippled by the absence of written orders and war diaries. But how eloquently he would discant on the resemblance between Dougal and Gouraud—how the plan of leaving the enemy to waste his strength upon a deserted position was that which on the 15th of July, 1918, the French general had used with decisive effect in Champagne! But Dougal had never heard of Gouraud, and I cannot claim that, like the Happy Warrior, he

“through the heat of conflict kept the law
In calmness made, and saw what he foresaw.”

I have had the benefit of discussing the affair with him and his colleagues, but I should offend against historic truth if I represented the main action as anything but a scrimmage—a “soldiers’ battle,” the historian would say, a Malplaquet, an Albuera.

Just after half-past three that afternoon the Commander-in-Chief was revealed in a very bad

temper. He had intercepted Sir Archie's car, and, since Léon was known to be fully occupied, had brought it in by the West Lodge, and hidden it behind a clump of laurels. There he had held a hoarse council of war. He had cast an appraising eye over Sime the butler, Carfrae the chauffeur, and McGuffog the gamekeeper, and his brows had lightened when he beheld Sir Archie with an armful of guns and two big cartridge-magazines. But they had darkened again at the first words of the leader of the reinforcements.

"Now for the Tower," Sir Archie had observed cheerfully. "We should be a match for the three watchers, my lad, and it's time that poor devil What's-his-name was relieved."

"A bonny-like plan that would be," said Dougal. "Man, ye would be walkin' into the very trap they want. In an hour, or maybe two, the rest will turn up from the sea and they'd have ye tight by the neck. Na, na! It's time we're wantin', and the longer they think we're a' in the auld Tower the better for us. What news o' the polis?"

He listened to Sir Archie's report with a gloomy face.

"Not afore the darkenin'? They'll be ower late—the polis are aye ower late. It looks as if we had the job to do oursels. What's *your* notion?"

"God knows," said the baronet whose eyes were on Saskia. "What's yours?"

The deference conciliated Dougal. "There's just the one plan that's worth a docken. There's five o' us here, and there's plenty weapons. Besides

there's five Die-Hards somewhere about, and though they've never tried it afore they can be trusted to loose off a gun. My advice is to hide at the Garplefoot and stop the boats landin'. We'd have the tinklers on our flank, no doubt, but I'm not muckle feared o' them. It wouldn't be easy for the boats to get in wi' this tearin' wind and us firin' volleys from the shore."

Sir Archie stared at him with admiration. "You're a hearty young fire-eater. But Great Scott! we can't go pottin' at strangers before we find out their business. This is a law-abidin' country, and we're not entitled to start shootin' except in self-defence. You can wash that plan out, for it ain't feasible."

Dougal spat cynically. "For all that it's the right strawtegy. Man, we might sink the lot, and then turn and settle wi' Dobson, and all afore the first polisman showed his neb. It would be a grand performance. But I was feared ye wouldn't be for it. . . . Well, there's just the one other thing to do. We must get inside the Hoose and put it in a state of defence. Heritage has McCunn's pistol, and he'll keep them busy for a bit. When they've finished wi' him and find the place is empty, they'll try the Hoose and we'll give them a warm reception. That should keep us goin' till the polis arrive, unless they're comin' wi' the blind carrier."

Sir Archie nodded. "But why put ourselves in their power at all? They're at present barking up the wrong tree. Let them bark up another wrong 'un. Why shouldn't the House remain empty? I

take it we're here to protect the Princess. Well, we'll have done that if they go off empty-handed."

Dougal looked up to the heavens. "I wish McCunn was here," he sighed. "Ay, we've got to protect the Princess, and there's just the one way to do it, and that's to put an end to this crowd o' blagyard. If they gang empty-handed, they'll come again another day, either here or somewhere else, and it won't be long afore they get the lassie. But if we finish with them now she can sit down wi' an easy mind. That's why we've got to hang on to them till the polis comes. There's no way out o' this business but a battle."

He found an ally. "Dougal is right," said Saskia. "If I am to have peace, by some way or other the fangs of my enemies must be drawn for ever."

He swung round and addressed her formally. "Mem, I'm askin' ye for the last time. Will ye keep out of this business? Will ye gang back and sit doun aside Mrs. Morran's fire and have your tea and wait till we come for ye? Ye can do no good, and ye're puttin' yourself terrible in the enemy's power. If we're beat and ye're no' there, they get very little satisfaction, but if they get *you* they get what they've come seekin'. I tell ye straight—ye're an encumbrance."

She laughed mischievously. "I can shoot better than you," she said.

He ignored the taunt. "Will ye listen to sense and fall to the rear?"

"I will not," she said.

"Then gang your own gait. I'm ower wise to argy-bargy wi' women. The Hoose be it!"

It was a journey which sorely tried Dougal's temper. The only way in was by the verandah, but the door at the west end had been locked, and the ladder had disappeared. Now of his party three were lame, one lacked an arm, and one was a girl; besides, there were the guns and cartridges to transport. Moreover, at more than one point before the verandah was reached the route was commanded by a point on the ridge near the old Tower, and that had been Spidel's position when Dougal made his last reconnaissance. It behoved to pass these points swiftly and unobtrusively, and his company was neither swift nor unobtrusive. McGuffog had a genius for tripping over obstacles, and Sir Archie was for ever proffering his aid to Saskia, who was in a position to give rather than to receive, being far the most active of the party. Once Dougal had to take the gamekeeper's head and force it down, a performance which would have led to an immediate assault but for Sir Archie's presence. Nor did the latter escape. "Will ye stop heedin' the lassie, and attend to your own job," the Chieftain growled. "Ye're makin' as much noise as a road-roller."

Arrived at the foot of the verandah wall there remained the problem of the escalade. Dougal clambered up like a squirrel by the help of cracks in the stones, and he could be heard trying the handle of the door into the House. He was absent for about five minutes and then his head peeped over the edge accompanied by the hooks of an iron

ladder. "From the boiler-house," he informed them as they stood clear for the thing to drop. It proved to be little more than half the height of the wall.

Saskia ascended first, and had no difficulty in pulling herself over the parapet. Then came the guns and ammunition, and then the one-armed Sime, who turned out to be an athlete. But it was no easy matter getting up the last three. Sir Archie anathematised his frailties. "Nice old crock to go tiger-shootin' with," he told the Princess. "But set me to something where my confounded leg don't get in the way, and I'm still pretty useful!" Dougal, mopping his brow with the rag he called his handkerchief, observed sourly that he objected to going scouting with a herd of elephants.

Once indoors his spirits rose. The party from the Mains had brought several electric torches and the one lamp was presently found and lit. "We can't count on the polis," Dougal announced, "and when the foreigners is finished wi' the Tower they'll come on here. If no', we must make them. What is it the sodgers call it? Forcin' a battle? Now see here! There's the two roads into this place, the back door and the verandy, leavin' out the front door which is chained and lockit. They'll try those two roads first and we must get them well barricaded in time. But mind, if there's a good few o' them, it'll be an easy job to batter in the front door or the windies, so we maun be ready for that."

He told off a fatigue party—the Princess, Sir Archie and McGuffog—to help in moving furniture

to the several doors. Sime and Carfrae attended to the kitchen entrance, while he himself made a tour of the ground-floor windows. For half an hour the empty house was loud with strange sounds. McGuffog, who was a giant in strength, filled the passage at the verandah end with an assortment of furniture ranging from a grand piano to a vast mahogany sofa, while Saskia and Sir Archie pillaged the bedrooms and packed up the interstices with mattresses in lieu of sandbags. Dougal on his return saw fit to approve their work.

"That'll fickle the blagyirds. Down at the kitchen door we've got a mangle, five wash-tubs and the best part of a ton o' coal. It's the windies I'm anxious about, for they're ower big to fill up. But I've gotten tubs o' water below them and a lot o' wire-nettin' I fund in the cellar."

Sir Archie morosely wiped his brow. "I can't say I ever hated a job more," he told Saskia. "It seems pretty cool to march into somebody else's house and make free with his furniture. I hope to goodness our friends from the sea do turn up, or we'll look pretty foolish. Loudon will have a score against me he won't forget."

"Ye're no' weakenin'?" asked Dougal fiercely.

"Not a bit. Only hopin' somebody hasn't made a mighty big mistake."

"Ye needn't be feared for that. Now you listen to your instructions. We're terrible few for such a big place, but we maun make up for shortness o' numbers by extra mobility. The gemkeeper will keep the windy that looks on the verandy, and fell

any man that gets through. You'll hold the verandy door, and the ither lame man—is't Carfrae ye call him?—will keep the back door. I've telled the one-armed man, who has some kind of a head on him, that he maun keep on the move, watchin' to see if they try the front door or any o' the other windies. If they do, he takes his station there. D'ye follow?"

Sir Archie nodded gloomily. "What is my post?" Saskia asked.

"I've appointed ye my Chief of Staff," was the answer. "Ye see we've no reserves. If this door's the dangerous bit, it maun be reinforced from elsewhere; and that'll want savage thinkin'. Ye'll have to be ay on the move, Mem, and keep me informed. If they break in at two bits, we're beat, and there'll be nothin' for it but to retire to our last position. Ye ken the room ayont the hall where they keep the coats. That's our last trench, and at the worst we fall back there and stick it out. It has a strong door and a wee windy, so they'll no' be able to get in on our rear. We should be able to put up a good defence there, unless they fire the place over our heads. . . . Now, we'd better give out the guns."

"We don't want any shootin' if we can avoid it," said Sir Archie, who found his distaste for Dōugal growing, though he was under the spell of the one being there who knew precisely his own mind.

"Just what I was goin' to say. My instructions is, reserve your fire, and don't loose off till you have a man up against the end o' your barrel."

"Good Lord, we'll get into a horrible row. The whole thing may be a mistake, and we'll be had up for wholesale homicide. No man shall fire unless I give the word."

The Commander-in-Chief looked at him darkly. Some bitter retort was on his tongue, but he restrained himself.

"It appears," he said, "that ye think I'm doin' all this for fun. I'll no 'argy wi' ye. There can be just the one general in a battle, but I'll give ye permission to say the word when to fire. . . . Macgregor!" he muttered, a strange expletive only used in moments of deep emotion. "I'll wager ye'll be for sayin' the word afore I'd say it mysel'."

He turned to the Princess. "I hand over to you, till I am back, for I maun be off and see to the Die-Hards. I wish I could bring them in here, but I daren't lose my communications. I'll likely get in by the boiler-house skylight when I come back, but it might be as well to keep a road open here unless ye're actually attacked."

Dougal clambered over the mattresses and the grand piano; a flicker of waning daylight appeared for a second as he squeezed through the door, and Sir Archie was left staring at the wrathful countenance of McGuffog. He laughed ruefully.

"I've been in about forty battles, and here's that little devil rather worried about my pluck, and talkin' to me like a corps commander to a newly joined second-lieutenant. All the same he's a remarkable child, and we'd better behave as if we

were in for a real shindy. What do you think, Princess?"

"I think we are in for what you call a shindy. I am in command, remember. I order you to serve out the guns."

This was done, a shot-gun and a hundred cartridges to each, while McGuffog, who was a marksman, was also given a sporting Mannlicher, and two other rifles, a .303 and a small-bore Holland, were kept in reserve in the hall. Sir Archie, free from Dougal's compelling presence, gave the gamekeeper peremptory orders not to shoot till he was bidden, and Carfrae at the kitchen door was warned to the same effect. The shuttered house, where the only light apart from the garden-room was the feeble spark of the electric torches, had the most disastrous effect upon his spirits. The gale which roared in the chimney and eddied among the rafters of the hall seemed an infernal commotion in a tomb.

"Let's go upstairs," he told Saskia; "there must be a view from the upper windows."

"You can see the top of the old Tower, and part of the sea," she said. "I know it well, for it was my only amusement to look at it. On clear days, too, one could see high mountains far in the west." His depression seemed to have affected her, for she spoke listlessly, unlike the vivid creature who had led the way in.

In a gaunt west-looking bedroom, the one in which Heritage and Dickson had camped the night before, they opened a fold of the shutters and looked out into a world of grey wrack and driving

rain. The Tower roof showed mistily beyond the ridge of down, but its environs were not in their prospect. The lower regions of the House had been gloomy enough, but this bleak place with its drab outlook struck a chill to Sir Archie's soul. He dolefully lit a cigarette.

"This is a pretty rotten show for you," he told her. "It strikes me as a rather unpleasant brand of nightmare."

"I have been living with nightmares for three years," she said wearily.

He cast his eyes round the room. "I think the Kennedys were mad to build this confounded barrack. I've always disliked it, and old Quentin hadn't any use for it either. Cold, cheerless, raw monstrosity! It hasn't been a very giddy place for you, Princess."

"It has been my prison, when I hoped it would be a sanctuary. But it may yet be my salvation."

"I'm sure I hope so. I say, you must be jolly hungry. I don't suppose there's any chance of tea for you."

She shook her head. She was looking fixedly at the Tower, as if she expected something to appear there, and he followed her eyes.

"Rum old shell, that. Quentin used to keep all kinds of live stock there, and when we were boys it was our castle where we played at bein' robber chiefs. It'll be dashed queer if the real thing should turn up this time. I suppose McCunn's Poet is roostin' there all by his lone. Can't say I envy him his job."

Suddenly she caught his arm. "I see a man," she whispered. "There! He is behind those far bushes. There is his head again!"

It was clearly a man, but he presently disappeared, for he had come round by the south end of the House, past the stables, and had now gone over the ridge.

"The cut of his jib is uncommonly like Loudon, the factor. I thought McCunn had stretched him on a bed of pain. Lord, if this thing should turn out a farce, I simply can't face Loudon. . . . I say, Princess, you don't suppose by any chance that McCunn's a little bit wrong in the head?"

She turned her candid eyes on him. "You are in a very doubting mood."

"My feet are cold and I don't mind admittin' it. Hanged if I know what it is, but I don't feel this show a bit real. If it isn't, we're in a fair way to make howlin' idiots of ourselves, and get pretty well embroiled with the law. It's all right for the red-haired boy, for he can take everything seriously, even play. I could do the same thing myself when I was a kid. I don't mind runnin' some kinds of risk—I've had a few in my time—but this is so infernally outlandish and I—I don't quite believe in it. That is to say, I believe in it right enough when I look at you or listen to McCunn, but as soon as my eyes are off you I begin to doubt again. I'm gettin' old and I've a stake in the country, and I daresay I'm gettin' a bit of a prig—anyway I don't want to make a jackass of myself. Besides, there's

this foul weather and this beastly house to ice my feet."

He broke off with an exclamation, for on the grey cloud-bounded stage in which the roof of the Tower was the central feature, actors had appeared. Dim hurrying shapes showed through the mist, dipping over the ridge, as if coming from the Garplefoot.

She seized his arm and he saw that her listlessness was gone. Her eyes were shining.

"It is they," she cried. "The nightmare is real at last. Do you doubt now?"

He could only stare, for these shapes arriving and vanishing like wisps of fog still seemed to him phantasmal. The girl held his arm tightly clutched, and craned towards the window space. He tried to open the frame, and succeeded in smashing the glass. A swirl of wind drove inwards and blew a loose lock of Saskia's hair across his brow.

"I wish Dougal were back," he muttered, and then came the crack of a shot.

The pressure on his arm slackened, and a pale face was turned to him. "He is alone—Mr. Heritage. He has no chance. They will kill him like a dog."

"They'll never get in," he assured her. "Dougal said the place could hold out for hours."

Another shot followed and presently a third. She twined her hands and her eyes were wild.

"We can't leave him to be killed," she gasped.

"It's the only game. We're playin' for time, remember. Besides he won't be killed. Great Scott!"

As he spoke, a sudden explosion cleft the drone of the wind and a patch of gloom flashed into yellow light.

"Bomb!" he cried. "Lord, I might have thought of that."

The girl had sprung back from the window. "I cannot bear it. I will not see him murdered in sight of his friends. I am going to show myself, and when they see me they will leave him. . . . No, you must stay here. Presently they will be round this house. Don't be afraid for me—I am very quick of foot."

"For God's sake, don't! Here, Princess, stop," and he clutched at her skirt. "Look here, I'll go."

"You can't. You have been wounded. I am in command, you know. Keep the door open till I come back."

He hobbled after her, but she easily eluded him. She was smiling now, and blew a kiss to him. "La, la, la," she trilled, as she ran down the stairs. He heard her voice below, admonishing McGuffog. Then he pulled himself together and went back to the window. He had brought the little Holland with him, and he poked its barrel through the hole in the glass.

"Curse my game leg," he said, almost cheerfully, for the situation was now becoming one with which he could cope. "I ought to be able to hold up the pursuit a bit. My aunt! What a girl!"

With the rifle cuddled to his shoulder he watched a slim figure come into sight on the lawn, running towards the ridge. He reflected that she must have

dropped from the high verandah wall. That reminded him that something must be done to make the wall climbable for her return, so he went down to McGuffog, and the two squeezed through the barricaded door to the verandah. The boiler-house ladder was still in position, but it did not reach half the height, so McGuffog was adjured to stand by to help, and in the meantime to wait on duty by the wall. Then he hurried upstairs to his watch-tower.

The girl was in sight, almost on the crest of the high ground. There she stood for a moment, one hand clutching at her errant hair, the other shielding her eyes from the sting of the rain. He heard her cry, as Heritage had heard her, but since the wind was blowing towards him the sound came louder and fuller. Again she cried, and then stood motionless with her hands above her head. It was only for an instant, for the next he saw she had turned and was racing down the slope, jumping the little scrogs of hazel like a deer. On the ridge appeared faces, and then over it swept a mob of men.

She had a start of some fifty yards, and laboured to increase it, having doubtless the verandah wall in mind. Sir Archie, sick with anxiety, nevertheless spared time to admire her prowess. "Gad! she's a miler," he ejaculated. "She'll do it. I'm hanged if she don't do it."

Against men in seaman's boots and heavy clothing she had a clear advantage. But two shook themselves loose from the pack and began to gain on her. At the main shrubbery they were not thirty

yards behind, and in her passage through it her skirts must have delayed her, for when she emerged the pursuit had halved the distance. He got the sights of the rifle on the first man, but the lawns sloped up towards the house, and to his consternation he found that the girl was in the line of fire. Madly he ran to the other window of the room, tore back the shutters, shivered the glass, and flung his rifle to his shoulder. The fellow was within three yards of her, but thank God! he had now a clear field. He fired low and just ahead of him, and had the satisfaction to see him drop like a rabbit, shot in the leg. His companion stumbled over him, and for a moment the girl was safe.

But her speed was failing. She passed out of sight on the verandah side of the house, and the rest of the pack had gained ominously over the easier ground of the lawn. He thought for a moment of trying to stop them by his fire, but realised that if every shot told there would still be enough of them left to make sure of her capture. The only chance was at the verandah, and he went downstairs at a pace undreamed of since the days when he had two whole legs.

McGuffog, Mannlicher in hand, was poking his neck over the wall. The pursuit had turned the corner and were about twenty yards off; the girl was at the foot of the ladder, breathless, drooping with fatigue. She tried to climb, limply and feebly, and very slowly, as if she were too giddy to see clear. Above were two cripples, and at her back the van of the now triumphant pack.

Sir Archie, game leg or no, was on the parapet preparing to drop down and hold off the pursuit were it only for seconds. But at that moment he was aware that the situation had changed.

At the foot of the ladder a tall man seemed to have sprung out of the ground. He caught the girl in his arms, climbed the ladder, and McGuffog's great hands reached down and seized her and swung her into safety. Up the wall, by means of cracks and tufts, was shinning a small boy.

The stranger coolly faced the pursuers and at the sight of him they checked, those behind stumbling against those in front. He was speaking to them in a foreign tongue, and to Sir Archie's ear the words were like the crack of a lash. The hesitation was only for a moment, for a voice among them cried out, and the whole pack gave tongue shrilly and surged on again. But that instant of check had given the stranger his chance. He was up the ladder, and, gripping the parapet, found rest for his feet in a fissure. Then he bent down, drew up the ladder, handed it to McGuffog and with a mighty heave pulled himself over the top.

He seemed to hope to defend the verandah, but the door at the west end was being assailed by a contingent of the enemy, and he saw that its thin woodwork was yielding.

"Into the House," he cried, as he picked up the ladder and tossed it over the wall on the pack surging below. He was only just in time, for the west door yielded. In two steps he had followed McGuffog through the chink into the passage, and the

concussion of the grand piano pushed hard against the verandah door from within coincided with the first battering on the said door from without.

In the garden-room the feeble lamp showed a strange grouping. Saskia had sunk into a chair to get her breath, and seemed too dazed to be aware of her surroundings. Dougal was manfully striving to appear at his ease, but his lip was quivering.

"A near thing that time," he observed. "It was the blame of that man's auld motor-bicycle."

The stranger cast sharp eyes around the place and company.

"An awkward corner, gentlemen," he said. "How many are there of you? Four men and a boy? And you have placed guards at all the entrances?"

"They have bombs," Sir Archie reminded him.

"No doubt. But I do not think they will use them here—or their guns, unless there is no other way. Their purpose is kidnapping, and they hope to do it secretly and slip off without leaving a trace. If they slaughter us, as they easily can, the cry will be out against them, and their vessel will be unpleasantly hunted. Half their purpose is already spoiled, for it is no longer secret. . . . They may break us by sheer weight, and I fancy the first shooting will be done by us. It's the windows I'm afraid of."

Some tone in his quiet voice reached the girl in the wicker chair. She looked up wildly, saw him and with a cry of "Alesha" ran to his arms. There she hung, while his hand fondled her hair, like a

mother with a scared child. Sir Archie, watching the whole thing in some stupefaction, thought he had never in his days seen more nobly matched human creatures.

"It is my friend," she cried triumphantly, "the friend whom I appointed to meet me here. Oh, I did well to trust him. Now we need not fear anything."

As if in ironical answer came a great crashing at the verandah door, and the twanging of chords cruelly mishandled. The grand piano was suffering internally from the assaults of the boiler-house ladder.

"Wull I gie them a shot?" was McGuffog's hoarse inquiry.

"Action stations," Alexis ordered, for the command seemed to have shifted to him from Dougal. "The windows are the danger. The boy will patrol the ground floor, and give us warning, and I and this man," pointing to Sime, "will be ready at the threatened point. And for God's sake no shooting, unless I give the word. If we take them on at that game we haven't a chance."

He said something to Saskia in Russian and she smiled assent and went to Sir Archie's side. "You and I must keep this door," she said.

Sir Archie was never very clear afterwards about the events of the next hour. The Princess was in the maddest spirits, as if the burden of three years had slipped from her and she was back in her first girlhood. She sang as she carried more lumber to the pile—perhaps the song which had once en-

tranced Heritage, but Sir Archie had no ear for music. She mocked at the furious blows which rained at the other end, for the door had gone now, and in the windy gap could be seen a blur of dark faces. Oddly enough, he found his own spirits mounting to meet hers. It was real business at last, the qualms of the civilian had been forgotten, and there was rising in him that joy in a scrap which had once made him one of the most daring airmen on the Western Front. The only thing that worried him now was the coyness about shooting. What on earth were his rifles and shot-guns for unless to be used? He had seen the enemy from the verandah wall, and a more ruffianly crew he had never dreamed of. They meant the uttermost business, and against such it was surely the duty of good citizens to wage whole-hearted war.

The Princess was humming to herself a nursery rhyme. "The King of Spain's daughter," she crooned, "came to visit me, and all for the sake—— Oh, that poor piano!" In her clear voice she cried something in Russian, and the wind carried a laugh from the verandah. At the sound of it she stopped. "I had forgotten," she said. "Paul is there. I had forgotten." After that she was very quiet, but she redoubled her labours at the barricade.

To the man it seemed that the pressure from without was slackening. He called to McGuffog to ask about the garden-room window, and the reply was reassuring. The gamekeeper was gloomily contemplating Dougal's tubs of water and wire-

netting, as he might have contemplated a vermin trap.

Sir Archie was growing acutely anxious—the anxiety of the defender of a straggling fortress which is vulnerable at a dozen points. It seemed to him that strange noises were coming from the rooms beyond the hall. Did the back door lie that way? And was not there a smell of smoke in the air? If they tried fire in such a gale the place would burn like matchwood.

He left his post and in the hall found Dougal.

“All quiet,” the Chieftain reported. “Far ower quiet. I don’t like it. The enemy’s no’ puttin’ out his strength yet. The Russian says a’ the west windies are terrible dangerous. Him and the chauffeur’s doin’ their best, but ye can’t block thae muckle glass panes.”

He returned to the Princess, and found that the attack had indeed languished on that particular barricade. The withers of the grand piano were left unwrung, and only a faint scuffling informed him that the verandah was not empty. “They’re gathering for an attack elsewhere,” he told himself. But what if that attack were a feint? He and McGuffog must stick to their post, for in his belief the verandah door and the garden-room window were the easiest places where an entry in mass could be forced.

Suddenly Dougal’s whistle blew, and with it came a most almighty crash somewhere towards the west side. With a shout of “Hold tight, McGuffog,”

Sir Archie bolted into the hall, and, led by the sound, reached what had once been the ladies' bedroom. A strange sight met his eyes, for the whole framework of one window seemed to have been thrust inward, and in the gap Alexis was swinging a fender. Three of the enemy were in the room—one senseless on the floor, one in the grip of Sime, whose single hand was tightly clenched on his throat, and one engaged with Dougal in a corner. The Die-Hard leader was sore pressed, and to his help Sir Archie went. The fresh assault made the seaman duck his head, and Dougal seized the occasion to smite him hard with something which caused him to roll over. It was Spidel's life-preserver which he had annexed that afternoon.

Alexis at the window seemed to have for a moment daunted the attack. "Bring that table," he cried, and the thing was jammed into the gap. "Now you"—this to Sime—"get the man from the back door to hold this place with his gun. There's no attack there. It's about time for shooting now, or we'll have them in our rear. What in heaven is that?"

It was McGuffog whose great bellow resounded down the corridor. Sir Archie turned and shuffled back, to be met by a distressing spectacle. The lamp, burning as peacefully as it might have burned on an old lady's tea-table, revealed the window of the garden-room driven bodily inward, shutters and all, and now forming an inclined bridge over Dougal's ineffectual tubs. In front of it stood McGuffog, swinging his gun by the barrel and yelling

curse, which, being mainly couched in the vernacular, were happily meaningless to Saskia. She herself stood at the hall door, plucking at something hidden in her breast. He saw that it was a little ivory-handled pistol.

The enemy's feint had succeeded, for even as Sir Archie looked three men leaped into the room. On the neck of one the butt of McGuffog's gun crashed, but two scrambled to their feet and made for the girl. Sir Archie met the first with his fist, a clean drive on the jaw, followed by a damaging hook with his left that put him out of action. The other hesitated for an instant and was lost, for McGuffog caught him by the waist from behind and sent him through the broken frame to join his comrades without.

"Up the stairs," Dougal was shouting, for the little room beyond the hall was clearly impossible. "Our flank's turned. They're pourin' through the other windy." Out of a corner of his eye Sir Archie caught sight of Alexis, with Sime and Carfrae in support, being slowly forced towards them along the corridor. "Upstairs," he shouted. "Come on, McGuffog. Lead on, Princess." He dashed out the lamp, and the place was in darkness.

With this retreat from the forward trench line ended the opening phase of the battle. It was achieved in good order, and position was taken up on the first-floor landing, dominating the main staircase and the passage that led to the back stairs. At their back was a short corridor ending in a window which gave on the north side of the House above

the verandah, and from which an active man might descend to the verandah roof. It had been carefully reconnoitred beforehand by Dougal, and his were the dispositions.

The odd thing was that the retreating force were in good heart. The three men from the Mains were warming to their work, and McGuffog wore an air of genial ferocity. "Dashed fine position I call this," said Sir Archie. Only Alexis was silent and preoccupied. "We are still at their mercy," he said. "Pray God your police come soon." He forbade shooting yet awhile. "The lady is our strong card," he said. "They won't use their guns while she is with us, but if it ever comes to shooting they can wipe us out in a couple of minutes. One of you watch that window, for Paul Abreskov is no fool."

Their exhilaration was short-lived. Below in the hall it was black darkness save for a greyness at the entrance of the verandah passage; but the defence was soon aware that the place was thick with men. Presently there came a scuffling from Carfrae's post towards the back stairs, and a cry as of some one choking. And at the same moment a flare was lit below which brought the whole hall from floor to rafters into blinding light.

It revealed a crowd of figures, some still in the hall and some half-way up the stairs, and it revealed, too, more figures at the end of the upper landing where Carfrae had been stationed. The shapes were motionless like mannequins in a shop window.

"They've got us treed all right," Sir Archie groaned. "What the devil are they waiting for?"

"They wait for their leader," said Alexis.

No one of the party will ever forget the ensuing minutes. After the hubbub of the barricades the ominous silence was like icy water, chilling and petrifying with an indefinable fear. There was no sound but the wind, but presently mingled with it came odd wild voices.

"Hear to the whaups," McGuffog whispered.

Sir Archie, who found the tension unbearable, sought relief in contradiction. "You're an unscientific brute, McGuffog," he told his henchman. "It's a disgrace that a gamekeeper should be such a rotten naturalist. What would whaups be doin' here at this time of year?"

"A' the same, I could swear it's whaups, Sir Erchibald."

Then Dougal broke in and his voice was excited. "It's no whaups. That's our patrol signal. Man, there's hope for us yet. I believe it's the polis."

His words were unheeded, for the figures below drew apart and a young man came through them. His beautifully-shaped dark head was bare, and as he moved he unbuttoned his oilskins and showed the trim dark-blue garb of the yachtsman. He walked confidently up the stairs, an odd elegant figure among his heavy companions.

"Good afternoon, Alexis," he said in English. "I think we may now regard this interesting episode as closed. I take it that you surrender. Saskia, dear, you are coming with me on a little

journey. Will you tell my men where to find your baggage?"

The reply was in Russian. Alexis' voice was as cool as the other's, and it seemed to wake him to anger. He replied in a rapid torrent of words, and appealed to the men below, who shouted back. The flare was dying down, and shadows again hid most of the hall.

Dougal crept up behind Sir Archie. "Here, I think it's the polis. They're whistlin' outbye, and I hear folk cryin' to each other—no' the foreigners."

Again Alexis spoke, and then Saskia joined in. What she said rang sharp with contempt, and her fingers played with her little pistol.

Suddenly before the young man could answer Dobson bustled towards him. The innkeeper was labouring under some strong emotion, for he seemed to be pleading and pointing urgently towards the door.

"I tell ye it's the polis," whispered Dougal. "They're nickit."

There was a swaying in the crowd and anxious faces. Men surged in, whispered and went out, and a clamour arose which the leader stilled with a fierce gesture.

"You there," he cried, looking up, "you English. We mean you no ill, but I require you to hand over to me the lady and the Russian who is with her. I give you a minute by my watch to decide. If you refuse my men are behind you and around you, and you go with me to be punished at my leisure."

"I warn you," cried Sir Archie. "We are armed, and will shoot down any one who dares to lay a hand on us."

"You fool," came the answer. "I can send you all to eternity before you touch a trigger."

Léon was by his side now—Léon and Spidel, imploring him to do something which he angrily refused. Outside there was a new clamour, faces showing at the door and then vanishing, and an anxious hum filled the hall. . . . Dobson appeared again and this time he was a figure of fury.

"Are ye daft, man?" he cried. "I tell ye the polis are closin' round us, and there's no' a moment to lose if we would get back to the boats. If ye'll no' think o' your own neck, I'm thinkin' o' mine. The whole thing's a bloody misfire. Come on, lads, if ye're no' besotted on destruction."

Léon laid a hand on the leader's arm and was roughly shaken off. Spidel fared no better, and the little group on the upper landing saw the two shrug their shoulders and make for the door. The hall was emptying fast, and the watchers had gone from the back stairs. The young man's voice rose to a scream; he commanded, threatened, cursed; but panic was in the air and he had lost his mastery.

"Quick," croaked Dougal, "now's the time for the counter-attack."

But the figure on the stairs held them motionless. They could not see his face, but by instinct they knew that it was distraught with fury and defeat. The flare blazed up again as the flame caught a knot

of fresh powder, and once more the place was bright with the uncanny light. . . . The hall was empty save for the pale man who was in the act of turning.

He looked back. "If I go now, I will return. The world is not wide enough to hide you from me, Saskia."

"You will never get her," said Alexis.

A sudden devil flamed into his eyes, the devil of some ancestral savagery, which would destroy what is desired but unattainable. He swung round, his hand went to his pocket, something clicked, and his arm shot out like a baseball pitcher's.

So intent was the gaze of the others on him, that they did not see a second figure ascending the stairs. Just as Alexis flung himself before the Princess, the new-comer caught the young man's outstretched arm and wrenched something from his hand. The next second he had hurled it into a far corner where stood the great fireplace. There was a blinding sheet of flame, a dull roar, and then billow upon billow of acrid smoke. As it cleared they saw that the fine Italian chimneypiece, the pride of the builder of the House, was a mass of splinters, and that a great hole had been blown through the wall into what had been the dining-room. . . . A figure was sitting on the bottom step feeling its bruises. The last enemy had gone.

When Mr. John Heritage raised his eyes he saw the Princess with a very pale face in the arms of a tall man whom he had never seen before. If he was surprised at the sight, he did not show it.

"Nasty little bomb that. Time fuse. I remember we struck the brand first in July '18."

"Are they rounded up?" Sir Archie asked.

"They've bolted. Whether they'll get away is another matter. I left half the mounted police a minute ago at the top of the West Lodge avenue. The other lot went to the Garplefoot to cut off the boats."

"Good Lord, man," Sir Archie cried, "the police have been here for the last ten minutes."

"You're wrong. They came with me."

"Then what on earth——?" began the astonished baronet. He stopped short, for he suddenly got his answer. Into the hall from the verandah limped a boy. Never was there seen so ruinous a child. He was dripping wet, his shirt was all but torn off his back, his bleeding nose was poorly staunchd by a wisp of handkerchief, his breeches were in ribbons, and his poor bare legs looked as if they had been comprehensively kicked and scratched. Limping he entered, yet with a kind of pride, like some small cock-sparrow who has lost most of his plumage but has vanquished his adversary.

With a yell Dougal went down the stairs. The boy saluted him, and they gravely shook hands. It was the meeting of Wellington and Blücher.

The Chieftain's voice shrilled in triumph, but there was a break in it. The glory was almost too great to be borne.

"I kenned it," he cried. "It was the Gorbals Die-Hards. There stands the man that done it. . . . Ye'll no' fickle Thomas Yownie."

CHAPTER XV

THE GORBALS DIE-HARDS GO INTO ACTION

WE left Mr. McCunn, full of aches but desperately resolute in spirit, hobbling by the Auchenlochan road into the village of Dalquharter. His goal was Mrs. Morran's hen-house, which was Thomas Yownie's *poste de commandement*. The rain had come on again, and, though in other weather there would have been a slow twilight, already the shadow of night had the world in its grip. The sea even from the high ground was invisible, and all to westward and windward was a ragged screen of dark cloud. It was foul weather for foul deeds.

Thomas Yownie was not in the hen-house, but in Mrs. Morran's kitchen, and with him were the pug-faced boy known as Old Bill, and the sturdy figure of Peter Paterson. But the floor was held by the hostess. She still wore her big boots, her petticoats were still kilted, and round her venerable head in lieu of a bonnet was drawn a tartan shawl.

"Eh, Dickson, but I'm blithe to see ye. And, puir man, ye've been sair mishandled. This is the awfu'est Sabbath day that ever you and me pit in. I hope it'll be forgiven us. . . . Whaur's the young leddy?"

"Dougal was saying she was in the House with Sir Archibald and the men from the Mains."

"Wae's me!" Mrs. Morran keened. "And what kind o' place is yon for her? Thae laddies tell me there's boatfu's o' scoondrels landit at the Garplefit. They'll try the auld Tower, but they'll no' wait there when they find it toom, and they'll be inside the Hoose in a jiffy and awa' wi' the puir lassie. Sirs, it maunna be. Ye're lippenin' to the polis, but in a' my days I never kenned the polis in time. We maun be up and daein' oorsels. Oh, if I could get a haud o' that red-heided Dougal. . . ."

As she spoke, there came on the wind the dull reverberation of an explosion.

"Keep us, what's that?" she cried.

"It's dinnymite," said Peter Paterson.

"That's the end o' the auld Tower," observed Thomas Yownie in his quiet even voice. "And it's likely the end o' the man Heritage."

"Lord peety us!" the old woman wailed. "And us standin' here like stookies and no' liftin' a hand. Awa' wi' ye, laddies, and dae something. Awa' you too, Dickson, or I'll tak' the road mysel'."

"I've got orders," said the Chief of Staff, "no' to move till the sityation's clear. Napoleon's up at the Tower and Jaikie in the policies. I maun wait on their reports."

For a moment Mrs. Morran's attention was distracted by Dickson, who suddenly felt very faint and sat down heavily on a kitchen chair. "Man, ye're as white as a dish-clout," she exclaimed with compunction. "Ye're fair wore out, and ye'll have had nae meat sin' your breakfast. See, and I'll get ye a cup o' tea."

She proved to be in the right, for as soon as Dickson had swallowed some mouthfuls of her strong scalding brew the colour came back to his cheeks, and he announced that he felt better. "Ye'll fortify it wi' a dram," she told him, and produced a black bottle from her cupboard. "My father aye said that guid whiskey and het tea keepit the doctor's gig oot o' the close."

The back door opened and Napoleon entered, his thin shanks blue with cold. He saluted and made his report in a voice shrill with excitement.

"The Tower has fallen. They've blown in the big door, and the feck o' them's inside."

"And Mr. Heritage?" was Dickson's anxious inquiry.

"When I last saw him he was up at a windy, shootin'. I think he's gotten on to the roof. I wouldna wonder but the place is on fire."

"Here, this is awful," Dickson groaned. "We can't let Mr. Heritage be killed that way. What strength is the enemy?"

"I counted twenty-seven, and there's stragglers comin' up from the boats."

"And there's me and you five laddies here, and Dougal and the others shut up in the House." He stopped in sheer despair. It was a fix from which the most enlightened business mind showed no escape. Prudence, inventiveness were no longer in question; only some desperate course of violence.

"We must create a diversion," he said. "I'm for the Tower, and you laddies must come with me."

We'll maybe see a chance. Oh, but I wish I had my wee pistol."

"If ye're gaun there, Dickson, I'm comin' wi' ye," Mrs. Morran announced.

Her words revealed to Dickson the preposterousness of the whole situation, and for all his anxiety he laughed. "Five laddies, a middle-aged man and an auld wife," he cried. "Dod, it's pretty hopeless. It's like the thing in the Bible about the weak things of the world trying to confound the strong."

"The Bible's whiles richt," Mrs. Morran answered drily. "Come on, for there's no time to lose."

The door opened again to admit the figure of Wee Jaikie. There were no tears in his eyes, and his face was very white.

"They're a' round the Hoose," he croaked. "I was up a tree fornent the verandy and seen them. The lassie ran oot and cried on them from the top o' the brae, and they a' turned and hunted her back. Gosh, but it was a near thing. I seen the Captain sklimmin' the wall, and a muckle man took the lassie and flung her up the ladder. They got inside just in time and steekit the door, and now the whole pack is roarin' round the Hoose seekin' a road in. They'll no' be long over the job, neither."

"What about Mr. Heritage?"

"They're no' heedin' about him any more. The auld Tower's bleedin'."

"Worse and worse," said Dickson. "If the police don't come in the next ten minutes, they'll be

away with the Princess. They've beaten all Dougal's plans, and it's a straight fight with odds of six to one. It's not possible."

Mrs. Morran for the first time seemed to lose hope. "Eh, the puir lassie!" she wailed, and sinking on a chair covered her face with her shawl.

"Laddies, can you no' think of a plan?" asked Dickson, his voice flat with despair.

Then Thomas Yownie spoke. So far he had been silent, but under his tangled thatch of hair, his mind had been busy. Jaikie's report seemed to bring him to a decision.

"It's gey dark," he said, "and it's gettin' darker."

There was that in his voice which promised something, and Dickson listened.

"The enemy's mostly foreigners, but Dobson's there and I think he's a kind of guide to them. Dobson's feared of the polis, and if we can terrify Dobson he'll terrify the rest."

"Ay, but where are the police?"

"They're no' here yet, but they're comin'. The fear o' them is aye in Dobson's mind. If he thinks the polis has arrived, he'll put the wind up the lot. . . . *We* maun be the polis."

Dickson could only stare while the Chief of Staff unfolded his scheme. I do not know to whom the Muse of History will give the credit of the tactics of "infiltration"—whether to Ludendorff or von Hutier or some other proud captain of Germany, or to Foch, who revised and perfected them. But I know that the same notion was at this moment of crisis conceived by Thomas Yownie, whom no

parents acknowledged, who slept usually in a coal cellar, and who had picked up his education among Gorbals closes and along the wharves of Clyde.

"It's gettin' dark," he said, "and the enemy are that busy tryin' to break into the Hoose that they'll no' be thinkin' o' their rear. The five o' us Die-Hards is grand at dodgin' and keepin' out of sight, and what hinders us to get in among them, so that they'll hear us but never see us? We're used to the ways o' the polis, and can imitate them fine. Forbye we've all got our whistles, which are the same as a bobbie's birl, and Old Bill and Peter are grand at copyin' a man's voice. Since the Captain is shut up in the Hoose, the command falls to me, and that's my plan."

With a piece of chalk he drew on the kitchen floor a rough sketch of the environs of Huntingtower. Peter Paterson was to move from the shrubberies beyond the verandah, Napoleon from the stables, Old Bill from the Tower, while Wee Jaikie and Thomas himself were to advance as if from the Garplefoot, so that the enemy might fear for his communications. "As soon as one o' ye gets into position he's to gie the patrol cry, and when each o' ye has heard five cries, he's to advance. Begin birlin' and roarin' afore ye get among them, and keep it up till ye're at the Hoose wall. If they've gotten inside, in ye go after them. I trust each Die-Hard to use his judgment, and above all to keep out o' sight and no let himsel' be grippit."

The plan, like all great tactics, was simple, and no sooner was it expounded than it was put into

action. The Die-Hards faded out of the kitchen like fog-wreaths, and Dickson and Mrs. Morran were left looking at each other. They did not look long. The bare feet of Wee Jaikie had not crossed the threshold fifty seconds, before they were followed by Mrs. Morran's out-of-doors boots and Dickson's tacketts. Arm in arm the two hobbled down the back path behind the village which led to the South Lodge. The gate was unlocked, for the warder was busy elsewhere, and they hastened up the avenue. Far off Dickson thought he saw shapes fleeting across the park, which he took to be the shock-troops of his own side, and he seemed to hear snatches of song. Jaikie was giving tongue, and this was what he sang:

“Proley Tarians, arise!
Wave the Red Flag to the skies,
Heed nae mair the Fat Man's lees,
Stap them down his throat!
Nocht to loss except our chains,
We maun drain oor dearest veins—
A' the worrld shall be our gains——”

But he tripped over a rabbit wire and thereafter conserved his breath.

The wind was so loud that no sound reached them from the House, which blank and immense now loomed before them. Dickson's ears were alert for the noise of shots or the dull crash of bombs; hearing nothing, he feared the worst, and hurried Mrs. Morran at a pace which endangered

her life. He had no fear for himself, arguing that his foes were seeking higher game, and judging, too, that the main battle must be round the verandah at the other end. The two passed the shrubbery where the road forked, one path running to the back door and one to the stables. They took the latter and presently came out on the downs, with the ravine of the Garple on their left, the stables in front, and on the right the hollow of a formal garden running along the west side of the House.

The gale was so fierce, now that they had no wind-break between them and the ocean, that Mrs. Morran could wrestle with it no longer, and found shelter in the lee of a clump of rhododendrons. Darkness had all but fallen, and the house was a black shadow against the dusky sky, while a confused greyness marked the sea. The old Tower showed a tooth of masonry; there was no glow from it, so the fire, which Jaikie had reported, must have died down. A whaup cried loudly, and very eerily: then another.

The birds stirred up Mrs. Morran. "That's the laddies' patrol," she gasped. "Count the cries, Dickson."

Another bird wailed, this time very near. Then there was perhaps three minutes' silence, till a fainter wheeple came from the direction of the Tower. "Four," said Dickson, but he waited in vain on the fifth. He had not the acute hearing of the boys, and could not catch the faint echo of Peter Paterson's signal beyond the verandah. The next

he heard was a shrill whistle cutting into the wind, and then others in rapid succession from different quarters, and something which might have been the hoarse shouting of angry men.

The Gorbals Die-Hards had gone into action.

Dull prose is no medium to tell of that wild adventure. The sober sequence of the military historian is out of place in recording deeds that knew not sequence or sobriety. Were I a bard, I would cast this tale in excited verse, with a lilt which would catch the speed of the reality. I would sing of Napoleon, not unworthy of his great namesake, who penetrated to the very window of the ladies' bedroom, where the framework had been driven in and men were pouring through; of how there he made such pandemonium with his whistle that men tumbled back and ran about blindly seeking for guidance; of how in the long run his pugnacity mastered him, so that he engaged in combat with an unknown figure and the two rolled into what had once been a fountain. I would hymn Peter Paterson, who across tracts of darkness engaged Old Bill in a conversation which would have done no discredit to a Gallogate policeman. He pretended to be making reports and seeking orders. "We've gotten three o' the deevils, sir. What'll we dae wi' them?" he shouted; and back would come the reply in a slightly more genteel voice: "Fall them to the rear. Tamson has charge of the prisoners." Or it would be: "They've gotten pistols, sir. What's the orders?" and the answer would be: "Stick to your batons. The guns are posted on the knowe, so we needn't

hurry." And over all the din there would be a perpetual whistling and a yelling of "Hands up!"

I would sing, too, of Wee Jaikie, who was having the red-letter hour of his life. His fragile form moved like a lizard in places where no mortal could be expected, and he varied his duties with impish assaults upon the persons of such as came in his way. His whistle blew in a man's ear one second and the next yards away. Sometimes he was moved to song, and unearthly fragments of "Class-conscious we are" or "Proley Tarians, arise!" mingled with the din, like the cry of seagulls in a storm. He saw a bright light flare up within the house which warned him not to enter, but he got as far as the garden-room, in whose dark corners he made havoc. Indeed he was almost too successful, for he created panic where he went, and one or two fired blindly at the quarter where he had last been heard. These shots were followed by frenzied prohibitions from Spidel and were not repeated. Presently he felt that aimless surge of men that is the prelude to flight, and heard Dobson's great voice roaring in the hall. Convinced that the crisis had come, he made his way outside, prepared to harass the rear of any retirement. Tears now flowed down his face, and he could not have spoken for sobs, but he had never been so happy.

But chiefly would I celebrate Thomas Yownie, for it was he who brought fear into the heart of Dobson. He had a voice of singular compass, and from the verandah he made it echo round the House. The efforts of Old Bill and Peter Paterson

had been skilful indeed, but those of Thomas Yownie were deadly. To some leader beyond he shouted news: "Robison's just about finished wi' his lot, and then he'll get the boats." A furious charge upset him, and for a moment he thought he had been discovered. But it was only Dobson rushing to Léon, who was leading the men in the doorway. Thomas fled to the far end of the verandah, and again lifted up his voice. "All foreigners," he shouted, "except the man Dobson. Ay. Ay. Ye've got Loudon? Well done!"

It must have been this last performance which broke Dobson's nerve and convinced him that the one hope lay in a rapid retreat to the Garplefoot. There was a tumbling of men in the doorway, a muttering of strange tongues, and the vision of the innkeeper shouting to Léon and Spidel. For a second he was seen in the faint reflection that the light in the hall cast as far as the verandah, a wild figure urging the retreat with a pistol clapped to the head of those who were too confused by the hurricane of events to grasp the situation. Some of them dropped over the wall, but most huddled like sheep through the door on the west side, a jumble of struggling, panic-stricken mortality. Thomas Yownie, staggered at the success of his tactics, yet kept his head and did his utmost to confuse the retreat, and the triumphant shouts and whistles of the other Die-Hards showed that they were not unmindful of this final duty. . . .

The verandah was empty, and he was just about to enter the House, when through the west door

came a figure, breathing hard and bent apparently on the same errand. Thomas prepared for battle, determined that no straggler of the enemy should now wrest from him victory, but, as the figure came into the faint glow at the doorway, he recognised it as Heritage. And at the same moment he heard something which made his tense nerves relax. Away on the right came sounds, a thud of galloping horses on grass and the jingle of bridle reins and the voices of men. It was the real thing at last. It is a sad commentary on his career, but now for the first time in his brief existence Thomas Yownie felt charitably disposed towards the police.

The Poet, since we left him blaspheming on the roof of the Tower, had been having a crowded hour of most inglorious life. He had started to descend at a furious pace, and his first misadventure was that he stumbled and dropped Dickson's pistol over the parapet. He tried to mark where it might have fallen in the gloom below, and this lost him precious minutes. When he slithered through the trap into the attic room, where he had tried to hold up the attack, he discovered that it was full of smoke which sought in vain to escape by the narrow window. Volumes of it were pouring up the stairs, and when he attempted to descend he found himself choked and blinded. He rushed gasping to the window, filled his lungs with fresh air, and tried again, but he got no further than the first turn, from which he could see through the cloud red tongues of flame in the ground room. This was solemn indeed, so

he sought another way out. He got on the roof, for he remembered a chimney-stack, cloaked with ivy, which was built straight from the ground, and he thought he might climb down it.

He found the chimney and began the descent, confidently, for he had once borne a good reputation at the Montanvert and Cortina. At first all went well, for stones stuck out at decent intervals like the rungs of a ladder, and roots of ivy supplemented their deficiencies. But presently he came to a place where the masonry had crumbled into a cave, and left a gap some twenty feet high. Below it he could dimly see a thick mass of ivy which would enable him to cover the further forty feet to the ground, but at that cave he stuck most finally. All round the lime and stone had lapsed into debris, and he could find no safe foothold. Worse still, the block on which he relied proved loose, and only by a dangerous traverse did he avert disaster.

There he hung for a minute or two, with a cold void in his stomach. He had always distrusted the handiwork of man as a place to scramble on, and now he was planted in the dark on a decomposing wall, with an excellent chance of breaking his neck, and with the most urgent need for haste. He could see the windows of the House and, since he was sheltered from the gale, he could hear the faint sound of blows on woodwork. There was clearly the devil to pay there, and yet here he was helplessly stuck. . . . Setting his teeth, he started to ascend again. Better the fire than this cold breakneck emptiness.

It took him the better part of half an hour to get back, and he passed through many moments of acute fear. Footholds which had seemed secure enough in the descent now proved impossible, and more than once he had his heart in his mouth when a rotten ivy stump or a wedge of stone gave in his hands, and dropped dully into the pit of night, leaving him crazily spread-eagled. When at last he reached the top he rolled on his back and felt very sick. Then, as he realised his safety, his impatience revived. At all costs he would force his way out though he should be grilled like a herring.

The smoke was less thick in the attic, and with his handkerchief wet with the rain and bound across his mouth he made a dash for the ground room. It was as hot as a furnace, for everything inflammable in it seemed to have caught fire, and the lumber glowed in piles of hot ashes. But the floor and walls were stone, and only the blazing jambs of the door stood between him and the outer air. He had burned himself considerably as he stumbled downwards, and the pain drove him to a wild leap through the broken arch, where he miscalculated the distance, charred his shins, and brought down a red-hot fragment of the lintel on his head. But the thing was done, and a minute later he was rolling like a dog in the wet bracken to cool his burns and put out various smouldering patches on his raiment.

Then he started running for the House, but, confused by the darkness, he bore too much to the north, and came out in the side avenue from which

he and Dickson had reconnoitred on the first evening. He saw on the right a glow in the verandah which, as we know, was the reflection of the flare in the hall, and he heard a babble of voices. But he heard something more, for away on his left was the sound which Thomas Yownie was soon to hear—the trampling of horses. It was the police at last, and his task was to guide them at once to the critical point of action. . . . Three minutes later a figure like a scarecrow was admonishing a bewildered sergeant, while his hands plucked feverishly at a horse's bridle.

It is time to return to Dickson in his clump of rhododendrons. Tragically aware of his impotence he listened to the tumult of the Die-Hards, hopeful when it was loud, despairing when there came a moment's lull, while Mrs. Morran like a Greek chorus drew loudly upon her store of proverbial philosophy and her memory of Scripture texts. Twice he tried to reconnoitre towards the scene of battle, but only blundered into sunken plots and pits in the Dutch garden. Finally he squatted beside Mrs. Morran, lit his pipe, and took a firm hold on his patience.

It was not tested for long. Presently he was aware that a change had come over the scene—that the Die-Hards' whistles and shouts were being drowned in another sound, the cries of panicky men. Dobson's bellow was wafted to him. "Auntie Phemie," he shouted, "the innkeeper's getting rattled. Dod, I believe they're running." For at that

moment twenty paces on his left the van of the retreat crashed through the creepers on the garden's edge and leaped the wall that separated it from the cliffs of the Garplefoot.

The old woman was on her feet.

"God be thankit, is't the polis?"

"Maybe. Maybe no'. But they're running."

Another bunch of men raced past, and he heard Dobson's voice.

"I tell you, they're broke. Listen, it's horses. Ay, it's the police, but it was the Die-Hards that did the job. . . . Here! They mustn't escape. Have the police had the sense to send men to the Garplefoot?"

Mrs. Morran, a figure like an ancient prophetess, with her tartan shawl lashing in the gale, clutched him by the shoulder.

"Doun to the waterside and stop them. Ye'll no' be beat by wee laddies! On wi' ye and I'll follow! There's gaun to be a juidgment on evil-doers this nicht."

Dickson needed no urging. His heart was hot within him, and the weariness and stiffness had gone from his limbs. He, too, tumbled over the wall, and made for what he thought was the route by which he had originally ascended from the stream. As he ran he made ridiculous efforts to cry like a whaup in the hope of summoning the Die-Hards. One, indeed, he found—Napoleon, who had suffered a grievous pounding in the fountain and had only escaped by an eel-like agility which had aforetime served him in good stead with the law of his

native city. Lucky for Dickson was the meeting, for he had forgotten the road and would certainly have broken his neck. Led by the Die-Hard he slid forty feet over scree and boiler-plates, with the gale plucking at him, found a path, lost it, and then tumbled down a raw bank of earth to the flat ground beside the harbour. During all this performance, he has told me, he had no thought of fear, nor any clear notion what he meant to do. He just wanted to be in at the finish of the job.

Through the narrow entrance the gale blew as through a funnel, and the usually placid waters of the harbour were a mass of angry waves. Two boats had been launched and were plunging furiously, and on one of them a lantern dipped and fell. By its light he could see men holding a further boat by the shore. There was no sign of the police; he reflected that probably they had become tangled in the Garple Dean. The third boat was waiting for some one.

Dickson—a new Ajax by the ships—divined who this some one must be and realised his duty. It was the leader, the arch-enemy, the man whose escape must at all costs be stopped. Perhaps he had the Princess with him, thus snatching victory from apparent defeat. In any case he must be tackled, and a fierce anxiety gripped his heart. "Aye finish a job," he told himself, and peered up into the darkness of the cliffs, wondering just how he should set about it, for except in the last few days he had never engaged in combat with a fellow-creature.

"When he comes, you grip his legs," he told

Napoleon, "and get him down. He'll have a pistol, and we're done if he's on his feet."

There was a cry from the boats, a shout of guidance, and the light on the water was waved madly. "They must have good eyesight," thought Dickson, for he could see nothing. And then suddenly he was aware of steps in front of him, and a shape like a man rising out of the void at his left hand.

In the darkness Napoleon missed his tackle, and the full shock came on Dickson. He aimed at what he thought was the enemy's throat, found only an arm and was shaken off as a mastiff might shake off a toy terrier. He made another clutch, fell, and in falling caught his opponent's leg so that he brought him down. The man was immensely agile, for he was up in a second and something hot and bright blew into Dickson's face. The pistol bullet had passed through the collar of his faithful waterproof, slightly singeing his neck. But it served its purpose, for Dickson paused, gasping, to consider where he had been hit, and before he could resume the chase the last boat had pushed off into deep water.

To be shot at from close quarters is always irritating, and the novelty of the experience increased Dickson's natural wrath. He fumed on the shore like a deerhound when the stag has taken to the sea. So hot was his blood that he would have cheerfully assaulted the whole crew had they been within his reach. Napoleon, who had been incapacitated for speed by having his stomach and bare shanks savagely trampled upon, joined him, and together they

watched the bobbing black specks as they crawled out of the estuary into the grey spindrift which marked the harbour mouth.

But as he looked the wrath died out of Dickson's soul. For he saw that the boats had indeed sailed on a desperate venture, and that a pursuer was on their track more potent than his breathless middle-age. The tide was on the ebb, and the gale was driving the Atlantic breakers shoreward, and in the jaws of the entrance the two waters met in an unearthly turmoil. Above the noise of the wind came the roar of the flooded Garple and the fret of the harbour, and far beyond all the crashing thunder of the conflict at the harbour mouth. Even in the darkness, against the still faintly grey western sky, the spume could be seen rising like waterspouts. But it was the ear rather than the eye which made certain presage of disaster. No boat could face the challenge of that loud portal.

As Dickson struggled against the wind and stared, his heart melted and a great awe fell upon him. He may have wept; it is certain that he prayed. "Poor souls, poor souls!" he repeated. "I doubt the last hour or two has been a poor preparation for eternity."

The tide next day brought the dead ashore. Among them was a young man, different in dress and appearance from the rest—a young man with a noble head and a finely-cut classic face, which was not marred like the others from pounding among the Garple rocks. His dark hair was washed back

from his brow, and the mouth, which had been hard in life, was now relaxed in the strange innocence of death.

Dickson gazed at the body and observed that there was a slight deformation between the shoulders.

"Poor fellow," he said. "That explains a lot. . . . As my father used to say, cripples have a right to be cankered."

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH A PRINCESS LEAVES A DARK TOWER AND
A PROVISION MERCHANT RETURNS TO HIS FAMILY

THE three days of storm ended in the night, and with the wild weather there departed from the Cruives something which had weighed on Dickson's spirits since he first saw the place. Monday—only a week from the morning when he had conceived his plan of holiday—saw the return of the sun and the bland airs of spring. Beyond the blue of the yet restless waters rose dim mountains tipped with snow, like some Mediterranean seascape. Nesting birds were busy on the Laver banks and in the Huntingtower thickets: the village smoked peacefully to the clear skies; even the House looked cheerful if dishevelled. The Garple Dean was a garden of swaying larches, linnets, and wild anemones. Assuredly, thought Dickson, there had come a mighty change in the countryside, and he meditated a future discourse to the Literary Society of the Guthrie Memorial Kirk on "Natural Beauty in Relation to the Mind of Man."

It remains for the chronicler to gather up the loose ends of his tale. There was no newspaper story with bold headlines of this the most recent assault on the shores of Britain. Alexis Nicolavitch, once a Prince of Muscovy and now Mr. Alex-

ander Nicholson of the rising firm of Sprot and Nicholson of Melbourne, had interest enough to prevent it. For it was clear that if Saskia was to be saved from persecution, her enemies must disappear without trace from the world, and no story be told of the wild venture which was their undoing. The constabulary of Carrick and Scotland Yard were indisposed to ask questions, under a hint from their superiors, the more so as no serious damage had been done to the persons of His Majesty's lieges, and no lives had been lost except by the violence of Nature. The Procurator-Fiscal investigated the case of the drowned men, and reported that so many foreign sailors, names and origins unknown, had perished in attempting to return to their ship at the Garplefoot. The Danish brig had vanished into the mist of the northern seas. But one signal calamity the Procurator-Fiscal had to record. The body of Loudon the factor was found on the Monday morning below the cliffs, his neck broken by a fall. In the darkness and confusion he must have tried to escape in that direction, and he had chosen an impracticable road or had slipped on the edge. It was returned as "death by misadventure" and the *Carrick Herald* and the *Auchenlochan Advertiser* excelled themselves in eulogy. Mr. Loudon, they said, had been widely known in the south-west of Scotland as an able and trusted lawyer, an assiduous public servant, and not least as a good sportsman. It was the last trait which had led to his death, for, in his enthusiasm for wild nature, he had been studying bird life on the cliffs of the

Cruives during the storm, and had made that fatal slip which had deprived the shire of a wise counsellor and the best of good fellows.

The tinklers of the Garplefoot took themselves off, and where they may now be pursuing their devious courses is unknown to the chronicler. Dobson, too, disappeared, for he was not among the dead from the boats. He knew the neighbourhood and probably made his way to some port from which he took passage to one or other of those foreign lands which had formerly been honoured by his patronage. Nor did all the Russians perish. Three were found skulking next morning in the woods, starving and ignorant of any tongue but their own, and five more came ashore much battered but alive. Alexis took charge of the eight survivors, and arranged to pay their passage to one of the British Dominions and to give them a start in a new life. They were broken creatures, with the dazed look of lost animals, and four of them had been peasants on Saskia's estates. Alexis spoke to them in their own language. "In my grandfather's time," he said, "you were serfs. Then there came a change, and for some time you were free men. Now you have slipped back into being slaves again—the worst of slaveries, for you have been the serfs of fools and scoundrels and the black passion of your own hearts. I give you a chance of becoming free men once more. You have the task before you of working out your own salvation. Go, and God be with you."

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Before we take leave of these companions of a single week I would present them to you again as they appeared on a certain sunny afternoon when the episode of Huntingtower was on the eve of closing. First we see Saskia and Alexis walking on the thymy sward of the cliff-top, looking out to the fretted blue of the sea. It is a fitting place for lovers, above all for lovers who have turned the page on a dark preface, and have before them still the long bright volume of life. The girl has her arm linked with the man's, but as they walk she breaks often away from him, to dart into copses, to gather flowers, or to peer over the brink where the gulls wheel and oyster-catchers pipe among the shingle. She is no more the tragic muse of the past week, but a laughing child again, full of snatches of song, her eyes bright with expectation. They talk of the new world which lies before them, and her voice is happy. Then her brows contract, and, as she flings herself down on a patch of young heather, her air is thoughtful.

"I have been back among fairy tales," she says. "I do not quite understand, Alesha. Those gallant little boys! They are youth, and youth is always full of strangeness. Mr. Heritage! He is youth, too, and poetry, perhaps, and a soldier's tradition. I think I know him. . . . But what about Dickson? He is the *petit bourgeois*, the *épicier*, the class which the world ridicules. He is unbelievable. The others with good fortune I might find elsewhere—in Russia perhaps. But not Dickson."

"No," is the answer. "You will not find him in

Russia. He is what we call the middle-class, which we who were foolish used to laugh at. But he is the stuff which above all others makes a great people. He will endure when aristocracies crack and proletariats crumble. In our own land we have never known him, but till we create him our land will not be a nation."

Half a mile away on the edge of the Laver glen Dickson and Heritage are together, Dickson placidly smoking on a tree-stump and Heritage walking excitedly about and cutting with his stick at the bracken. Sundry bandages and strips of sticking plaster still adorn the Poet, but his clothes have been tidied up by Mrs. Morran, and he has recovered something of his old precision of garb. The eyes of both are fixed on the two figures on the cliff-top. Dickson feels acutely uneasy. It is the first time that he has been alone with Heritage since the arrival of Alexis shivered the Poet's dream. He looks to see a tragic grief; to his amazement he beholds something very like exultation.

"The trouble about you, Dogson," says Heritage, "is that you're a bit of an anarchist. All you false romantics are. You don't see the extraordinary beauty of the conventions which time has consecrated. You always want novelty, you know, and the novel is usually the ugly and rarely the true. I am for romance, but upon the old, noble classic lines."

Dickson is scarcely listening. His eyes are on the distant lovers and he longs to say something which

will gently and graciously express his sympathy with his friend.

"I'm afraid," he begins hesitatingly, "I'm afraid you've had a bad blow, Mr. Heritage. You're taking it awful well, and I honour you for it."

The Poet flings back his head. "I am reconciled," he says. "After all 'tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.' It has been a great experience and has shown me my own heart. I love her, I shall always love her, but I realise that she was never meant for me. Thank God I've been able to serve her—that is all a moth can ask of a star. I'm a better man for it, Dogson. She will be a glorious memory, and Lord! what poetry I shall write! I give her up joyfully, for she has found her true mate. 'Let us not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments!' The thing's too perfect to grieve about. . . . Look! There is romance incarnate."

He points to the figures now silhouetted against the further sea. "How does it go, Dogson?" he cries. "'And on her lover's arm she leant'—what next? You know the thing."

Dickson assists and Heritage declaims:

"And on her lover's arm she leant,
 And round her waist she felt it fold,
 And far across the hills they went
 In that new world which is the old:
 Across the hills, and far away
 Beyond their utmost purple rim,
 And deep into the dying day
 The happy princess followed him."

He repeats the last two lines twice and draws a deep breath. "How right!" he cries. "How absolutely right! Lord! It's astonishing how that old bird Tennyson got the goods!"

After that Dickson leaves him and wanders among the thickets on the edge of the Huntingtower policies above the Laver glen. He feels childishly happy, wonderfully young, and at the same time supernaturally wise. Sometimes he thinks the past week has been a dream, till he touches the sticking-plaster on his brow, and finds that his left thigh is still a mass of bruises and that his right leg is wofully stiff. With that the past becomes very real again, and he sees the Garple Dean in that stormy afternoon, he wrestles again at midnight in the dark House, he stands with quaking heart by the boats to cut off the retreat. He sees it all, but without terror in the recollection, rather with gusto and a modest pride. "I've surely had a remarkable time," he tells himself, and then Romance, the goddess whom he has worshipped so long, marries that furious week with the idyllic. He is supremely content, for he knows that in his humble way he has not been found wanting. Once more for him the Chavender or Chub, and long dreams among summer hills. His mind flies to the days ahead of him, when he will go wandering with his pack in many green places. Happy days they will be, the prospect with which he has always charmed his mind. Yes, but they will be different from what he had fancied, for he is another man

than the complacent little fellow who set out a week ago on his travels. He has now assurance of himself, assurance of his faith. Romance, he sees, is one and indivisible. . . .

Below him by the edge of the stream he sees the encampment of the Gorbals Die-Hards. He calls and waves a hand, and his signal is answered. It seems to be washing day, for some scanty and tattered raiment is drying on the sward. The band is evidently in session, for it is sitting in a circle, deep in talk.

As he looks at the ancient tents, the humble equipment, the ring of small shockheads, a great tenderness comes over him. The Die-Hards are so tiny, so poor, so pitifully handicapped, and yet so bold in their meagreness. Not one of them has had anything that might be called a chance. Their few years have been spent in kennels and closes, always hungry and hunted, with none to care for them; their childish ears have been habituated to every coarseness, their small minds filled with the desperate shifts of living. . . . And yet, what a heavenly spark was in them! He had always thought nobly of the soul; now he wants to get on his knees before the queer greatness of humanity.

A figure disengages itself from the group, and Dougal makes his way up the hill towards him. The Chieftain is not more reputable in garb than when we first saw him, nor is he more cheerful of countenance. He has one arm in a sling made out of his neckerchief, and his scraggy little throat rises bare from his voluminous shirt. All that can be

said for him is that he is appreciably cleaner. He comes to a standstill and salutes with a special formality.

"Dougal," says Dickson, "I've been thinking. You're the grandest lot of wee laddies I ever heard tell of, and, forbye, you've saved my life. Now, I'm getting on in years, though you'll admit that I'm not that dead old, and I'm not a poor man, and I haven't chick or child to look after. None of you has ever had a proper chance or been right fed or educated or taken care of. I've just the one thing to say to you. From now on you're *my* bairns, every one of you. You're fine laddies, and I'm going to see that you turn into fine men. There's the stuff in you to make Generals and Provosts—ay, and Prime Ministers, and Dod! it'll not be my blame if it doesn't get out."

Dougal listens gravely and again salutes.

"I've brought ye a message," he says. "We've just had a meetin' and I've to report that ye've been unanimously eleckit Chief Die-Hard. We're a' hopin' ye'll accept."

"I accept," Dickson replies. "Proudly and gratefully I accept."

The last scene is some days later, in a certain southern suburb of Glasgow. Ulysses has come back to Ithaca, and is sitting by his fireside, waiting on the return of Penelope from the Neuk Hydro-pathic. There is a chill in the air, so a fire is burning in the grate, but the laden tea-table is bright with the first blooms of lilac. Dickson, in a new

suit with a flower in his buttonhole, looks none the worse for his travels, save that there is still sticking-plaster on his deeply sunburnt brow. He waits impatiently with his eye on the black marble timepiece, and he fingers something in his pocket.

Presently the sound of wheels is heard, and the peahen voice of Tibby announces the arrival of Penelope. Dickson rushes to the door and at the threshold welcomes his wife with a resounding kiss. He leads her into the parlour and settles her in her own chair.

"My! but it's nice to be home again!" she says. "And everything that comfortable. I've had a fine time, but there's no place like your own fireside. You're looking awful well, Dickson. But losh! What have you been doing to your head?"

"Just a small tumble. It's very near mended already. Ay, I've had a grand walking tour, but the weather was a wee bit thrawn. It's nice to see you back again, Mamma. Now that I'm an idle man you and me must take a lot of jaunts together."

She beams off him as she stays herself with Tibby's scones, and when the meal is ended, Dickson draws from his pocket a slim case. The jewels have been restored to Saskia, but this is one of her own which she has bestowed upon Dickson as a parting memento. He opens the case and reveals a necklet of emeralds, any one of which is worth half the street.

"This is a present for you," he says bashfully.

Mrs. McCunn's eyes open wide. "You're far

too kind," she gasps. "It must have cost an awful lot of money."

"It didn't cost me that much," is the truthful answer.

She fingers the trinket and then clasps it round her neck, where the green depths of the stones glow against the black satin of her bodice. Her eyes are moist as she looks at him. "You've been a kind man to me," she says, and she kisses him as she has not done since Janet's death.

She stands up and admires the necklet in the mirror. Romance once more, thinks Dickson. That which has graced the slim throats of princesses in far-away Courts now adorns an elderly matron in a semi-detached villa; the jewels of the wild Nausicaa have fallen to the housewife Penelope.

Mrs. McCunn preens herself before the glass. "I call it very genteel," she says. "Real stylish. It might be worn by a queen."

"I wouldn't say but it has," says Dickson.

THE END

John Macnab

To

ROSALIND MAITLAND

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JOHN MACNAB

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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THREE GENTLEMEN CONFESS THEIR ENNUI

THE great doctor stood on the hearth-rug looking down at his friend who sprawled before him in an easy-chair. It was a hot day in early July, and the windows were closed and the blinds half-down to keep out the glare and the dust. The standing figure had bent shoulders, a massive clean-shaven face, and a keen interrogatory air, and might have passed his sixtieth birthday. He looked like a distinguished lawyer, who would soon leave his practice for the Bench. But it was the man in the chair who was the lawyer, a man who had left forty behind him, but was still on the pleasant side of fifty.

‘I tell you for the tenth time that there’s nothing the matter with you.’

‘And I tell you for the tenth time that I’m miserably ill.’

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. ‘Then it’s a mind diseased to which I don’t propose to minister. What do you say is wrong?’

‘Simply what my housekeeper calls a “no-how” feeling.’

‘It’s clearly nothing physical. Your heart and lungs are sound. Your digestion’s as good as anybody’s can be

in London in midsummer. Your nerves — well, I've tried all the stock tests, and they appear to be normal.'

'Oh, my nerves are all right,' said the other wearily.

'Your brain seems good enough, except for this dismal obsession that you are ill. I can find no earthly thing wrong, except that you're stale. I don't say run-down, for that you're not. You're stale in mind. You want a holiday.'

'I don't. I may *need* one, but I don't *want* it. That's precisely the trouble. I used to be a glutton for holidays, and spent my leisure moments during term planning what I was going to do. Now there seems to be nothing in the world I want to do — neither work nor play.'

'Try fishing. You used to be keen.'

'I've killed all the salmon I mean to kill. I never want to look the ugly brutes in the face again.'

'Shooting?'

'Too easy and too dull.'

'A yacht.'

'Stop it, old fellow. Your catalogue of undesired delights only makes it worse. I tell you that there's nothing at this moment which has the slightest charm for me. I'm bored with my work, and I can't think of anything else of any kind for which I would cross the street. I don't even want to go into the country and sleep. It's been coming on for a long time — I dare say it's due somehow to the War; but when I was in office I did not feel it so badly, for I was in a service and not my own master. Now I've nothing to do except to earn an enormous income, which I haven't any need for. Work comes rolling in — I've got retainers for nearly every solvent

concern in this land — and all that happens is that I want to strangle my clerk and a few eminent solicitors. I don't care a tinker's curse for success, and what is worse, I'm just as apathetic about the modest pleasures which used to enliven my life.'

'You may be more tired than you think.'

'I'm not tired at all.' The speaker rose from his chair, yawning, and walked to the window to stare into the airless street. He did not look tired, for his movements were vigorous, and, though his face had the slight pallor of his profession, his eye was clear and steady. He turned round suddenly.

'I tell you what I've got. It's what the Middle Ages suffered from — I read a book about it the other day — and it's called *tædium vitæ*. It's a special kind of *ennui*. I can diagnose my ailment well enough, and Shakespeare has the words for it. I've come to a pitch where I find "nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon."'

'Then why do you come to me, if the trouble is not with your body?'

'Because you're *you*. I should come to you just the same if you were a vet., or a bone-setter, or a Christian Scientist. I want your advice, not as a fashionable consultant, but as an old friend and a wise man. It's a state of affairs that can't go on. What am I to do to get rid of this infernal disillusionment? I can't go through the rest of life dragging my wing.'

The doctor was smiling.

'If you ask my professional advice,' he said, 'I am bound to tell you that medical science has no suggestion to offer. If you consult me as a friend, I advise you to

steal a horse in some part of the world where a horse-thief is usually hanged.'

The other considered. 'Pretty drastic prescription for a man who has been a Law Officer of the Crown.'

'I speak figuratively. You've got to rediscover the comforts of your life by losing them for a little. You have good food and all the rest of it at your command — well, you've got to be in want for a bit to appreciate them. You're secure and respected and rather eminent — well, somehow or other get under the weather. If you could induce the newspapers to accuse you of something shady and have the devil of a job to clear yourself, it might do the trick. The fact is you've grown too competent. You need to be made to struggle for your life again — your life or your reputation. You have to find out the tonic of difficulty, and you can't find it in your profession. Therefore I say, "Steal a horse."'

A faint interest appeared in the other's eyes.

'That sounds to me good sense. But, hang it all, it's utterly unpractical. I can't go looking for scrapes. I should feel like play-acting if in cold blood I got myself into difficulties, and I take it that the essence of your prescription is that I must feel desperately in earnest.'

'I'm not prescribing. Heaven forbid that I should advise a friend to look for trouble. I'm merely stating how in the abstract I regard your case.'

The patient rose to go. 'Miserable comforters are ye all,' he groaned. 'Well, it appears you can do nothing for me except to suggest the advisability of crime. I suppose it's no good trying to make you take a fee?'

The doctor shook his head. 'I wasn't altogether

chaffing. Honestly, you would be the better of dropping for a month or two into another world — a harder one. A hand on a cattle-boat, for instance.'

Sir Edward Leithen sighed deeply as he turned from the doorstep down the long hot street. He did not look behind him, or he would have seen another gentleman approach cautiously round the corner of a side street, and, when the coast was clear, ring the doctor's bell. He was so completely fatigued with life that he neglected to be cautious at crossings, as was his habit, and was all but slain by a motor-omnibus. Everything seemed weary and over-familiar — the summer smell of town, the din of traffic, the panorama of faces, pretty women shopping, the occasional sight of a friend. Long ago, he reflected with disgust, there had been a time when he had enjoyed it all.

He found sanctuary at last in the shade and coolness of his club. He remembered that he was dining out, and bade the porter telephone that he could not come, giving no reason. He remembered, too, that there was a division in the House that night, an important division advertised by a three-line whip. He declined to go near the place. At any rate, he would have the dim consolation of behaving badly. His clerk was probably at the moment hunting feverishly for him, for he had missed a consultation in the great Argentine bank case which was in the paper next morning. That also could slide. He wanted, nay, he was determined, to make a mess of it.

Then he discovered that he was hungry, and that it was nearly the hour when a man may dine. 'I've only one positive feeling left,' he told himself, 'the satisfaction

of my brute needs. Nice position for a gentleman and a Christian!’

There was one other man in the dining-room, sitting at the little table in the window. At first sight he had the look of an undergraduate, a Rugby Blue, perhaps, who had just come down from the University, for he had the broad, slightly stooped shoulders of the football-player. He had a ruddy face, untidy sandy hair, and large reflective grey eyes. It was those eyes which declared his age, for round them were the many fine wrinkles which come only from the passage of time.

‘Hullo, John,’ said Leithen. ‘May I sit at your table?’

The other, whose name was Palliser-Yeates, nodded. ‘You may certainly eat in my company, but I’ve got nothing to say to you, Ned. I’m feeling as dried-up as a dead starfish.’

They ate their meal in silence, and so preoccupied was Sir Edward Leithen with his own affairs that it did not seem to him strange that Mr. Palliser-Yeates, who was commonly a person of robust spirits and plentiful conversation, should have the air of a deaf mute. When they had reached the fish, two other diners took their seats and waved them a greeting. One of them was a youth with lean, high-coloured cheeks, who limped slightly; the other a tallish man older with a long dark face, a small dark moustache, and a neat pointed chin which gave him something of the air of a hidalgo. He looked weary and glum, but his companion seemed to be in the best of tempers, for his laugh rang out in that empty place with a startling boyishness. Mr. Palliser-Yeates looked up angrily, with a shiver.

'Noisy brute, Archie Roylance!' he observed. 'I suppose he's above himself since Ascot. His horse won some beastly race, didn't it? It's a good thing to be young and an ass.'

There was that in his tone which roused Leithen from his apathy. He cast a sharp glance at the other's face.

'You're off-colour.'

'No,' said the other brusquely. 'I'm perfectly fit. Only I'm getting old.'

This was food for wonder, inasmuch as Mr. Palliser-Yeates had a reputation for a more than youthful energy, and, although forty-five years of age, was still accustomed to do startling things on the Chamonix *aiguilles*. He was head of an eminent banking firm and something of an authority on the aberrations of post-war finance.

A gleam of sympathy came into Leithen's eyes.

'How does it take you?' he asked.

'I've lost zest. Everything seems more or less dust and ashes. When you suddenly wake up and find that you've come to regard your respectable colleagues as so many fidgety old women and the job you've given your life to as an infernal squabble about trifles — why, you begin to wonder what's going to happen.'

'I suppose a holiday ought to happen.'

'The last thing I want. That's my complaint. I have no desire to do anything, work or play, and yet I'm not tired — only bored.'

Leithen's sympathy had become interest.

'Have you seen a doctor?'

The other hesitated. 'Yes,' he said at length. 'I saw old Acton Croke this afternoon. He was no earthly use. He advised me to go to Moscow and fix up a trade

agreement. He thought that might make me content with my present lot.'

'He told *me* to steal a horse.'

Mr. Palliser-Yeates stared in extreme surprise. 'You! Do you feel the same way? Have you been to Croke?'

'Three hours ago. I thought he talked good sense. He said I must get into a rougher life so as to appreciate the blessings of the life that I'm fed up with. Probably he is right, but you can't take that sort of step in cold blood.'

Mr. Palliser-Yeates assented. The fact of having found an associate in misfortune seemed to enliven slightly, very slightly, the spirits of both. From the adjoining table came, like an echo from a happier world, the ringing voice and hearty laughter of youth. Leithen jerked his head towards them.

'I would give a good deal for Archie's gusto,' he said. 'My sound right leg, for example. Or, if I couldn't get that, I'd like Charles Lamancha's insatiable ambition. If you want as much as he wants, you don't suffer from tedium.'

Palliser-Yeates looked at the gentleman in question, the tall dark one of the two diners. 'I'm not so sure. Perhaps he has got too much too easily. He has come on uncommon quick, you know, and, if you do that, there's apt to arrive a moment when you flag.'

Lord Lamancha — the title had no connection with Don Quixote and Spain, but was the name of a shieling in a Border glen which had been the home six centuries ago of the ancient house of Merkland — was an object of interest to many of his countrymen. The Marquis of Liddesdale, his father, was a hale old man who might

reasonably be expected to live for another ten years and so prevent his son's career being compromised by a premature removal to the House of Lords. He had a safe seat for a London division, was a member of the Cabinet, and had a high reputation for the matter-of-fact oratory which has replaced the pre-war grandiloquence. People trusted him, because, in spite of his hidalgo-ish appearance, he was believed to have that combination of candour and intelligence which England desires in her public men. Also he was popular, for his record in the War and the rumour of a youth spent in adventurous travel touched the imagination of the ordinary citizen. At the moment he was being talked of for a great Imperial post which was soon to become vacant, and there was gossip, in the alternative, of a Ministerial readjustment which would make him the pivot of a controversial Government. It was a remarkable position for a man to have won in his early forties, who had entered public life with every disadvantage of birth.

'I suppose he's happy,' said Leithen. 'But I've always held that there was a chance of Charles kicking over the traces. I doubt if his ambition is an organic part of him and not stuck on with pins. There's a fundamental daftness in all Merklands. I remember him at school.'

The two men finished their meal and retired to the smoking-room, where they drank their coffee abstractedly. Each was thinking about the other, and wondering what light the other's case could shed on his own. The speculation gave each a faint glimmer of comfort.

Presently the voice of Sir Archibald Roylance was heard, and that ebullient young man flung himself down on a sofa beside Leithen, while Lord Lamancha selected a

cigar. Sir Archie settled his game leg to his satisfaction, and filled an ancient pipe.

'Heavy weather,' he announced. 'I've been trying to cheer up old Charles and it's been like castin' a fly against a thirty-mile gale. I can't make out what's come over him. Here's a deservin' lad like me struggling at the foot of the ladder and not cast down, and there's Charles high up on the top rungs as glum as an owl and declarin' that the whole thing's foolishness. Shockin' spectacle for youth.'

Lamancha, who had found an armchair beside Palliser-Yeates, looked at the others and smiled wryly.

'Is that true, Charles?' Leithen asked. 'Are you also feeling hipped? Because John and I have just been confessing to each other that we're more fed up with everything in this gay world than we've ever been before in our useful lives.'

Lamancha nodded. 'I don't know what has come over me. I couldn't face the House to-night, so I telephoned to Archie to come and cheer me. I suppose I'm stale, but it's a new kind of staleness, for I'm perfectly fit in body, and I can't honestly say I feel weary in mind. It's simply that the light has gone out of the landscape. Nothing has any savour.'

The three men had been at school together, they had been contemporaries at the University, and close friends ever since. They had no secrets with each other. Leithen, into whose face and voice had come a remote hint of interest, gave a sketch of his own mood, and the diagnosis of the eminent consultant. Archie Roylance stared blankly from one to the other, as if some new thing had broken in upon his simple philosophy of life.

'You fellows beat me!' he cried. 'Here you are, every one of you a swell of sorts, with everything to make you cheerful, and you're grousin' like a labour battalion! You should be jolly well ashamed of yourselves. It's fairly temptin' Providence. What you want is some hard exercise. Go and sweat ten hours a day on a steep hill, and you'll get rid of these notions.'

'My dear Archie,' said Leithen, 'your prescription is too crude. I used to be fond enough of sport, but I wouldn't stir a foot to catch a sixty-pound salmon or kill a fourteen-pointer. I don't want to. I see no fun in it. I'm *blasé*. It's too easy.'

'Well, I'm dashed! You're the worst spoiled lad I ever heard of, and a nice example to democracy.' Archie spoke as if his gods had been blasphemed.

'Democracy, anyhow, is a good example to us. I know now why workmen strike sometimes and can't give any reason. We're on strike — against our privileges.'

Archie was not listening. 'Too easy, you say?' he repeated. 'I call that pretty fair conceit. I've seen you miss birds often enough, old fellow.'

'Nevertheless, it seems to me too easy. Everything has become too easy, both work and play.'

'You can screw up the difficulty, you know. Try shootin' with a twenty-bore, or fishin' for salmon with a nine-foot rod and a dry-fly cast.'

'I don't want to kill anything,' said Palliser-Yeates. 'I don't see the fun of it.'

Archie was truly shocked. Then a light of reminiscence came into his eye. 'You remind me of poor old Jim Tarras,' he said thoughtfully.

There were no enquiries about Jim Tarras, so Archie volunteered further news.

'You remember Jim? He had a little place somewhere in Moray, and spent most of his time shootin' in East Africa. Poor chap, he went back there with Smuts in the War and perished of blackwater. Well, when his father died and he came home to settle down, he found it an uncommon dull job. So, to enliven it he invented a new kind of sport. He knew all there was to be known about *shikar*, and from trampin' about the Highlands he had a pretty accurate knowledge of the countryside. So he used to write to the owner of a deer forest and present his compliments, and beg to inform him that between certain dates he proposed to kill one of his stags. When he had killed it, he undertook to deliver it to the owner, for he wasn't a thief.'

'I call that poaching on a grand scale,' observed Palliser-Yeates.

'Wasn't it? Most of the fellows he wrote to accepted his challenge and told him to come and do his damndest. Little Avington, I remember, turned on every man and boy about the place for three nights to watch the forest. Jim usually worked by night, you see. One or two curmudgeons talked of the police and prosecutin' him, but public opinion was against them — too dashed unsportin'.'

'Did he always get his stag?' Leithen asked.

'In-var-i-ably, and got it off the ground and delivered it to the owner, for that was the rule of the game. Sometimes he had a precious near squeak, and Avington, who was going off his head at the time, tried to pot him — shot a gillie in the leg too. But Jim always won out. I should think he was the best *shikari* God ever made.'

‘Is that true, Archie?’ Lamancha’s voice had a magisterial tone.

‘True — as — true. I know all about it, for Wattie Lithgow, who was Jim’s man, is with me now. He and his wife keep house for me at Crask. Jim never took but the one man with him, and that was Wattie, and he made him just about as cunning an old dodger as himself.’

Leithen yawned. ‘What sort of a place is Crask?’ he enquired.

‘Tiny little place. No fishin’ except some hill lochs and only rough shootin’. I take it for the birds. Most marvellous nestin’ ground in Britain barrin’ some of the Outer Islands. I don’t know why it should be, but it is. Something to do with the Gulf Stream, maybe. Anyhow, I’ve got the greenshank breedin’ regularly and the red-throated diver, and half-a-dozen rare duck. It’s a marvellous stoppin’ place in spring, too, for birds goin’ north.’

‘Are you much there?’

‘Generally in April, and always from the middle of August till the middle of October. You see, it’s about the only place I know where you can do exactly as you like. The house is stuck away up on a long slope of moor, and you see the road for a mile from the windows, so you’ve plenty of time to take to the hills if anybody comes to worry you. I roost there with old Sime, my butler, and the two Lithgows, and put up a pal now and then who likes the life. It’s the jolliest bit of the year for me.’

‘Have you any neighbours?’

‘Heaps, but they don’t trouble me much. Crask’s the earthenware pot among the brazen vessels — mighty hard to get to and nothing to see when you get there. So the brazen vessels keep to themselves.’

Lamancha went to a shelf of books above a writing-table and returned with an atlas. 'Who are your brazen vessels?' he asked.

'Well, my brassiest is old Claybody at Haripol — that's four miles off across the hill.'

'Bit of a swine, isn't he?' said Leithen.

'Oh, no. He's rather a good old bird himself. Don't care so much for his family. Then there's Glenraden t'other side of the Larrig' — he indicated a point on the map which Lamancha was studying — 'with a real old Highland grandee living in it — Alastair Raden — commanded the Scots Guards, I believe, in the year One. Family as old as the Flood and very poor, but just manage to hang on. He's the last Raden that will live there, but that doesn't matter so much, as he has no son — only a brace of daughters. Then, of course, there's the show place, Strathlarrig — horrible great house as large as a factory, but wonderful fine salmon-fishin'. Some Americans have got it this year — Boston or Philadelphia, I don't remember which — very rich and said to be rather high-brow. There's a son, I believe.'

Lamancha closed the atlas.

'Do you know any of these people, Archie?' he asked.

'Only the Claybodys — very slightly. I stayed with them in Suffolk for a cover shoot two years ago. The Radens have been to call on me, but I was out. The Bandicotts — that's the Americans — are new this year.'

'Is the sport good?'

'The very best. Haripol is about the steepest and most sportin' forest in the Highlands, and Glenraden is nearly as good. There's no forest at Strathlarrig, but, as I've told you, amazin' good salmon fishin'. For a

west coast river I should put the Larrig only second to the Laxford.'

Lamancha consulted the atlas again and appeared to ponder. Then he lifted his head, and his long face, which had a certain heaviness and sullenness in repose, was now lit by a smile which made it handsomer and younger.

'Could you have me at Crask this autumn?' he asked. 'My wife has to go to Aix for a cure and I have no plans after the House rises.'

'I should jolly well think so!' cried Archie. 'There's heaps of room in the old house, and I promise you I'll make you comfortable. Look here, you fellows! Why shouldn't all three of you come? I can get in a couple of extra maids from Inverlarrig.'

'Excellent idea,' said Lamancha. 'But you mustn't bother about the maids. I'll bring my own man, and we'll have a male establishment except for Mrs. Lithgow. . . . By the way, I suppose you can count on Mrs. Lithgow?'

'How do you mean, "count"? ' asked Archie, rather puzzled. Then a difficulty struck him. 'But wouldn't you be bored? I can't show you much in the way of sport, and you're not naturalists like me. It's a quiet life, you know.'

'I shouldn't be bored,' said Lamancha. 'I should take steps to prevent it.'

Leithen and Palliser-Yeates seemed to divine his intention, for they simultaneously exclaimed.

'It isn't fair to excite Archie, Charles,' the latter said. 'You know that you'll never do it.'

'I intend to have a try. Hang it, John, it's the specific we were talking about — devilish difficult, devilish un-

pleasant, and calculated to make a man long for a dull life. Of course you two fellows will join me.'

'What on earth are you talkin' about?' said the mystified Archie. 'Join what?'

'We're proposing to quarter ourselves on you, my lad, and take a leaf out of Jim Tarras's book.'

Sir Archie first stared, then he laughed nervously, then he called upon his gods, then he laughed freely and long. 'Do you really mean it? What an almighty rag! . . . But hold on a moment. It will be rather awkward for me to take a hand. You see I've just been adopted as prospective candidate for that part of the country.'

'So much the better. If you're found out — which you won't be — you'll get the poaching vote solid, and a good deal more. Most men at heart are poachers.'

Archie shook a doubting head. 'I don't know about that. They're an awfully respectable lot up there, and all those dashed stalkers and keepers and gillies are a sort of trade-union. The scallywags are a hopeless minority. If I get sent to quod —'

'You won't get sent to quod. At the worst, it will be a fine, and you can pay that. What's the extreme penalty for this kind of offence, Ned?'

'I don't knqw,' Leithen answered. 'I'm not an authority on Scots law. But Archie's perfectly right. We can't go making a public exhibition of ourselves like this. We're too old to be listening to the chimes at midnight.'

'Now, look here.' Lamancha had shaken off his glumness and was as tense and eager as a schoolboy. 'Didn't your doctor advise you to steal a horse? Well, this is a long sight easier than horse-stealing. It's admitted that we three want a tonic. On second thoughts, Archie had

better stand out — he hasn't our ailment, and a healthy man doesn't need medicine. But we three need it, and this idea is an inspiration. Of course we take risks, but they're sound sporting risks. After all, I've a reputation of a kind, and I put as much into the pool as any one.'

His hearers regarded him with stony faces, but this in no way checked his ardour.

'It's a perfectly first-class chance. A lonely house where you can see visitors a mile off, and an unsociable dog like Archie for a host. We write the letters and receive the answers at a London address. We arrive at Crask by stealth, and stay there unbeknown to the countryside, for Archie can count on his people and my man is a sepulchre. Also we've got Lithgow, who played the same game with Jim Tarras. We have a job which will want every bit of our nerve and ingenuity with a reasonable spice of danger — for, of course, if we fail, we should cut queer figures. The thing is simply ordained by Heaven for our benefit. Of course you'll come.'

'I'll do nothing of the kind,' said Leithen.

'No more will I,' said Palliser-Yeates.

'Then I'll go alone,' said Lamancha cheerfully. 'I'm out for a cure, if you're not. You've a month to make up your mind, and meanwhile a share in the syndicate remains open to you.'

Sir Archie looked as if he wished he had never mentioned the fatal name of Jim Tarras. 'I say, you know, Charles,' he began hesitatingly, but was cut short.

'Are you going back on your invitation?' asked Lamancha sternly. 'Very well, then, I've accepted it, and what's more, I'm going to draft a specimen letter that

will go to your Highland grandee, and Claybody and the American.'

He rose with a bound and fetched a pencil and a sheet of notepaper from the nearest writing-table. 'Here goes — *Sir, I have the honour to inform you that I propose to kill a stag — or a salmon, as the case may be — on your ground between midnight on — and midnight —.* We can leave the dates open for the present. *The animal, of course, remains your property and will be duly delivered to you. It is a condition that it must be removed wholly outside your bounds. In the event of the undersigned failing to achieve his purpose, he will pay as forfeit one hundred pounds, and, if successful, fifty pounds to any charity you may appoint. I have the honour to be, your obedient humble servant.*'

'What do you say to that?' he asked. 'Formal, a little official, but perfectly civil, and the writer proposes to pay his way like a gentleman. Bound to make a good impression.'

'You've forgotten the signature,' Leithen observed dryly.

'It must be signed with a *nom de guerre*.' He thought for a moment. 'I've got it. At once business-like and mysterious.' At the bottom of the draft he scrawled the name 'John Macnab.'

CHAPTER II

DESPERATE CHARACTERS IN COUNCIL

CRASK — which is properly Craoisg and is so spelled by the Ordnance Survey — when the traveller approaches it from the Larrig Bridge has the air of a West Highland terrier, *couchant* and *regardant*. You are to picture a long tilt of moorland running east and west, not a smooth lawn of heather, but seamed with gullies and patched with bogs and thickets and crowned at the summit with a low line of rocks above which may be seen peeping the spikes of the distant Haripol hills. About three quarters of the way up the slope stands the little house, white-washed, slated, grey stone framing the narrow windows, with that attractive jumble of masonry which belongs to an adapted farm. It is approached by a road which scorns détours and runs straight from the glen highway, and it looks south over broken moorland to the shining links of the Larrig, and beyond them to the tributary glen of the Raden and the dark mountains of its source. Such is the view from the house itself, but from the garden behind there is an ampler vista, since to the left a glimpse may be had of the policies of Strathlarrig and even of a corner of that monstrous mansion, and to the right of the tidal waters of the river and the yellow sands on which in the stillest weather the Atlantic frets. Crask is at once a sanctuary and a watch-tower; it commands a wide countryside and yet preserves its secrecy, for, though officially approached by a road like a ruler, there are a dozen sheltered ways of reaching it by the dips and crannies of the hillside.

So thought a man who about five o'clock on the afternoon of the 24th of August was inconspicuously drawing towards it by way of a peat road which ran from the east through a wood of birches. Sir Edward Leithen's air was not more cheerful than when we met him a month ago, except that there was now a certain vigour in it which came from ill-temper. He had been for a long walk in the rain, and the scent of wet bracken and birches and bog myrtle, the peaty fragrance of the hills salted with the tang of the sea, had failed to comfort, though, not so long ago, it had had the power to intoxicate. Scrambling in the dell of a burn, he had observed both varieties of the filmy fern and what he knew to be a very rare cerast, and, though an ardent botanist, he had observed them unmoved. Soon the rain had passed, the west wind blew aside the cloud-wrack, and the Haripol tops had come out black against a turquoise sky, with Sgurr Dearg, awful and remote, towering above all. Though a keen mountaineer, the spectacle had neither exhilarated nor tantalised him. He was in a bad temper, and he knew that at Crask he should find three other men in the same case, for even the debonair Sir Archie was in the dumps with a toothache.

He told himself that he had come on a fool's errand, and the extra absurdity was that he could not quite see how he had been induced to come. He had consistently refused: so had Palliser-Yeates; Archie as a prospective host had been halting and nervous; there was even a time when Lamancha, the source of all the mischief, had seemed to waver. Nevertheless, some occult force — false shame probably — had shepherded them all here, unwillingly, unconvinced, cold-footed, destined to a pre-

posterous adventure for which not one of them had the slightest zest. . . . Yet they had taken immense pains to arrange the thing, just as if they were all exulting in the prospect. His own clerk was to attend to the forwarding of their letters, including any which might be addressed to 'John Macnab.' The newspapers had contained paragraphs announcing that the Countess of Lamancha had gone to Aix for a month, where she would presently be joined by her husband, who intended to spend a week drinking the waters before proceeding to his grouse-moor of Leriote in the Borders. The 'Times' three days ago had recorded Sir Edward Leithen and Mr. John Palliser-Yeates as among those who had left Euston for Edinburgh, and more than one social paragrapher had mentioned that the ex-Attorney-General would be spending his holiday fishing on the Tay, while the eminent banker was to be the guest of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at an informal vacation conference on the nation's precarious finances. Lamancha had been fetched under cover of night by Archie from a station so remote that no one but a lunatic would think of using it. Palliser-Yeates had tramped for two days across the hills from the south, and Leithen himself, having been instructed to bring a Ford car, had had a miserable drive of a hundred and fifty miles in the rain, during which he had repeatedly lost his way. He had carried out his injunctions as to secrecy by arriving at two in the morning by means of this very peat road. The troops had achieved their silent concentration, and the silly business must now begin. Leithen 'groaned, and anathematised the memory of Jim Tarras.

As he approached the house, he saw to his amaze-

ment a large closed car making its way down the slope. Putting his glass on it, he watched it reach the glen road and then turn east, passing the gates of Strathlarrig, till he lost it behind a shoulder of hill. Hurrying across the stableyard, he entered the house by the back-door, disturbing Lithgow the keeper in the midst of a whispered confabulation with Lamancha's man, whose name was Shapp. Passing through the gun-room he found, in the big smoking-room which looked over the valley, Lamancha and Palliser-Yeates with the crouch of conspirators flattening their noses on the window-panes.

The sight of him diverted the attention of the two from the landscape.

'This is an infernal plant,' Palliser-Yeates exclaimed. 'Archie swore to us that no one ever came here, and the second day a confounded great car arrives. Charles and I had just time to nip in here and lock the door, while Archie parleyed with them. He's been uncommon quick about it. The brutes didn't stay for more than five minutes.'

'Who were they?' Leithen asked.

'Only got a side glance at them. They seemed to be a stout woman and a girl — oh, and a yelping little dog. I expect Archie kicked him, for he was giving tongue from the drawing-room.'

The door opened to admit their host who bore in one hand a large whiskey-and-soda. He dropped wearily into a chair, where he sipped the beverage. An observer might have noted that what could be seen of his wholesome face was much inflamed, and that a bandage round chin and cheeks, which ended in a topknot above his

scalp, gave him the appearance of Ricquet with the Tuft in the fairy tale.

‘That’s all right,’ he said, in the tone of a man who has done a good piece of work. ‘I’ve choked off visitors at Crask for a bit, for the old lady will put it all round the countryside.’

‘Put what?’ said Leithen, and ‘Who is the old lady?’ asked Lamancha, and ‘Did you kick the dog?’ demanded Palliser-Yeates.

Archie looked drearily at his friends. ‘It was Lady Claybody and a daughter — I think the second one — and their horrid little dog. They won’t come back in a hurry — nobody will come back — I’m marked down as a pariah. Hang it, I may as well chuck my candidature. I’ve scuppered my prospects for the sake of you three asses.’

‘What has the blessed martyr been and done?’ asked Palliser-Yeates.

‘I’ve put a barrage round this place, that’s all. I was very civil to the Claybodys, though I felt a pretty fair guy with my head in a sling. I bustled about, talkin’ nonsense and offerin’ tea, and then, as luck would have it, I trod on the hound. That’s the worst of my game leg. The brute nearly had me over, and it started howlin’ — you must have heard it. That dog’s a bit weak in the head, for it can’t help barkin’ just out of pure cussedness — Lady Claybody says it’s high-strung because of its fine breedin’. It got something to bark for this time, and the old woman had it in her arms fondlin’ it and lookin’ very old-fashioned at me. It seems the beast’s name is Roguie and she called it her “darlin’ Wee Roguie,” for she’s pickin’ up a bit of Scots since she came to

live in these parts. . . . Lucky Mackenzie wasn't at home. He'd have eaten it. . . . Well, after that things settled down, and I was just goin' to order tea, when it occurred to the daughter to ask what was wrong with my face. Then I had an inspiration.'

Archie paused and smiled sourly.

'I said I didn't know, but I feared I might be sickenin' for smallpox. I hinted that my face was a horrid sight under the bandage.'

'Good for you, Archie,' said Lamancha. 'What happened then?'

'They bolted — fairly ran for it. They did record time into their car — scarcely stopped to say good-bye. I suppose you realise what I've done, you fellows. The natives here are scared to death of infectious diseases, and if we hadn't our own people we wouldn't have a servant left in the house. The story will be all over the countryside in two days, and my only fear is that it may bring some medical officer of health nosin' round . . . Anyhow it will choke off visitors.'

'Archie, you're a brick,' was Lamancha's tribute.

'I'm very much afraid I'm a fool, but thank Heaven I'm not the only one. Sime,' he shouted in a voice of thunder, 'what's happened to tea?'

The shout brought the one-armed butler and Shapp with the apparatus of the meal, and an immense heap of letters all addressed to Sir Archibald Roylance.

'Hullo! the mail has arrived,' cried the master of the house. 'Now let's see what's the news of John Macnab?'

He hunted furiously among the correspondence, tearing open envelopes and distributing letters to the others with the rapidity of a conjuror. One little sealed packet

he reserved to the last, and drew from it three missives bearing the same superscription. These he opened, glanced at and handed to Lamancha. 'Read 'em out, Charles,' he said. 'It's the answers at last.'

Lamancha read slowly the first document, of which this is the text.

GLENRADEN CASTLE

STRATHLARRIG, *Aug.* — 19—

SIR,

I have received your insolent letter. I do not know what kind of rascal you may be, except that you have the morals of a bandit and the assurance of a halfpenny journalist. But since you seem in your perverted way to be a sportsman, I am not the man to refuse your challenge. My reply is, sir, damn your eyes and have a try. I defy you to kill a stag in my forest between midnight on the 28th of August and midnight of the 30th. I will give instructions to my men to guard my marches, and if you should be roughly handled by them you have only to blame yourself.

Yours faithfully

ALASTAIR RADEN

JOHN MACNAB, ESQ.

'That's a good fellow,' said Archie with conviction. 'Just the sort of letter I'd write myself. He takes things in the proper spirit. But it's a blue lookout for your chances, my lads. What old Raden doesn't know about deer isn't knowledge.'

Lamancha read the second reply.

STRATHLARRIG HOUSE

STRATHLARRIG, *Aug.* — 19—

MY DEAR SIR,

Your letter was somewhat of a surprise, but as I am not yet familiar with the customs of this country, I forbear to enlarge on this point, and since you have marked it 'Confidential' I am unable to take advice. You state that you intend to kill a salmon in the Strathlarrig water between mid-

night on September 1st and midnight on September 3d, this salmon, if killed, to remain my property. I have consulted such books as might give me guidance, and I am bound to state that in my view the laws of Scotland are hostile to your suggested enterprise. Nevertheless, I do not take my stand on the law, for I presume that your proposition is conceived in a sporting spirit, and that you dare me to stop you. Well, sir, I will see you on that hand. The fishing is not that good at present that I am inclined to quarrel about one salmon. I give you leave to use every method that may occur to you to capture that fish, and I promise to use every method that may occur to me to prevent you. In your letter you undertake to use only 'legitimate means.' I would have pleasure in meeting you in the same spirit, but I reckon that all means are counted legitimate in the capture of poachers.

Cordially

JUNIUS THEODORE BANDICOTT

MR. J. MACNAB.

'That's the young 'un,' Archie observed. 'The old man was christened "Acheson" and don't take any interest in fishin'. He spends his time lookin' for Norse remains.'

'He seems a decent sort of fellow,' said Palliser-Yeates, 'but I don't quite like the last sentence. He'll probably try shooting same as his countrymen once did on the Beaulieu. Whoever gets this job will have some excitement for his money.'

Lamancha read out the last letter.

227 NORTH MELVILLE STREET -
EDINBURGH, Aug. — 19—

Re Haripol Forest

SIR,

Our client, the Right Honorable Lord Claybody, has read to us on the telephone your letter of Aug. — and has desired us to reply to it. We are instructed to say that our client is at a loss to understand how to take your communication,

whether as a piece of impertinence or as a serious threat. If it is the latter and you persist in your intention, we are instructed to apply to the Court for a summary interdict to prevent your entering upon his lands. We would also point out that under the Criminal Law of Scotland any person whatsoever who commits a trespass in the daytime by entering upon any land without leave of the proprietor, in pursuit of, *inter alia*, deer, is liable to a fine of £2, while if such person have his face blackened, or if five or more persons acting in concert commit the trespass, the penalty is £5 (2 & 3 William IV, c 68).

We are, sir

Your obedient servants

PROSSER, MCKELPIE, AND MACLYMONT

JOHN MACNAB, ESQ.

Lamancha laughed. 'Is that good law, Ned?'

Leithen read the letter again. 'I suppose so. Deer being *feræ naturæ*, there is no private property in them or common-law crime in killing them, and the only remedy is to prevent trespass in pursuit of them or to punish the trespasser.'

'It seems to me that you get off pretty lightly,' said Archie. 'Two quid is not much in the way of a fine, for I don't suppose you want to black your faces or march five deep into Haripol. . . . But what a rotten sportsman old Claybody is!'

Palliser-Yeates heaved a sigh of apparent relief. 'I am bound to say the replies are better than I expected. It will be a devil of a business, though, to circumvent that old Highland chief, and that young American sounds formidable. Only, if we're caught out there, we're dealing with sportsmen and can appeal to their higher nature, you know. Claybody is probably the easiest proposition so far as getting a stag is concerned, but if we're nobbled

by him we needn't look for mercy. Still it's only a couple of pounds.'

'You're an ass, John,' said Leithen. 'It's only a couple of pounds for John Macnab. But if these infernal Edinburgh lawyers get on to the job, it will be a case of producing the person of John Macnab, and then we're all in the cart. Don't you realise that in this fool's game we simply cannot afford to lose — none of us?'

'That,' said Lamancha, 'is beyond doubt the truth, and it's just there that the fun comes in.'

The reception of the three letters had brightened the atmosphere. Each man had now something to think about, and till it was time to dress for dinner, each was busy with sheets of the Ordnance maps. The rain had begun again, the curtains were drawn, and round a good fire of peats they read and smoked and dozed. Then they had hot baths, and it was a comparatively cheerful and very hungry party that assembled in the dining-room. Archie proposed champagne, but the offer was unanimously declined. 'We ought to be in training,' Lamancha warned him. 'Keep the "Widow" for the occasions when we need comforting. They'll come all right.'

Palliser-Yeates was enthusiastic about the food. 'I must say, you do us very well,' he told his host. 'These haddocks are the best things I've ever eaten. How do you manage to get fresh sea fish here?'

Archie appealed to Sime. 'They come from Inverlarrig, Sir Erchibald,' said the butler. 'There's a wee laddie comes up here sellin' haddies verra near every day.'

'Bless my soul, Sime. I thought no one came up here. You know my orders.'

‘This is just a tinkler laddie, Sir Erchibald. He sleeps in a cairt down about Larrigmore. He just comes up wi’ his powny and awa’ back, and doesna bide twae minutes. Mistress Lithgow was anxious for haddies, for she said gentlemen got awfu’ tired of saumon and trout.’

‘All right, Sime. I’ll speak to Mrs. Lithgow. She’d better tell him we don’t want any more. By the way, we ought to see Lithgow after dinner. Tell him to come to the smoking-room.’

When Sime had put the port on the table and withdrawn, Leithen lifted up his voice.

‘Look here, before we get too deep into this thing, let’s make sure that we know where we are. We’ve all three turned up here — why, I don’t know. But there’s still time to go back. We realise now what we’re in for. Are you clear in your minds that you want to go on?’

‘I am,’ said Lamancha doggedly. ‘I’m out for a cure. Hang it, I feel a better man already.’

‘I suppose your profession makes you take risks,’ said Leithen dryly. ‘Mine doesn’t. What about you, John?’

Palliser-Yeates shifted uneasily in his chair. ‘I don’t want to go on. I feel no kind of keenness, and my feet are rather cold. And yet — you know — I should feel rather ashamed to turn back.’

Archie uplifted his turbaned head. ‘That’s how I feel, though I’m not on myself in this piece. We’ve given hostages, and the credit of John Macnab is at stake. We’ve dared old Raden and young Bandicott, and we can’t decently cry off. Besides, I’m advertised as a smallpox patient, and it would be a pity to make a goat of myself for nothing. Mind you, I stand to lose as much as anybody, if we bungle things.’

Leithen had the air of bowing to the inevitable. 'Very well, that's settled. But I wish to Heaven I saw myself safely out of it. My only inducement to go on is to score off that bounder Claybody. He and his attorney's letter put my hackles up.'

In the smoking-room Lamancha busied himself with preparing three slips of paper and writing on them three names.

'We must hold a council of war,' he said. 'First of all, we have taken measures to keep our presence here secret. My man Shapp is all right. What about your people, Archie?'

'Sime and Carfrae have been warned, and you may count on them. They're the class of lads that ask no questions. So are the Lithgows. We've no neighbours, and they're anyway not the gossipin' kind, and I've put them on their Bible oath. I fancy they think the reason is politics. They're a trifle scared of you, Charles, and your reputation, for they're not accustomed to hidin' Cabinet Ministers in the scullery. Lithgow's a fine crusted old Tory.'

'Good. Well, we'd better draw for beats, and get Lithgow in.'

The figure that presently appeared before them was a small man, about fifty years of age, with a great breadth of shoulder and a massive face decorated with a wispish tawny beard. His mouth had the gravity and primness of an elder of the Kirk, but his shrewd blue eyes were not grave. The son of a Tweeddale shepherd, who had emigrated years before to a cheviot farm in Sutherland, he was in every line and feature the Lowlander, and his speech had still the broad intonation of the Borders. But

all his life had been spent in the Highlands on this and that deer forest, and as a young stalker he had been picked out by Jim Tarras for his superior hill-craft. To Archie his chief recommendation was that he was a passionate naturalist, who was as eager to stalk a rare bird with a field-glass as to lead a rifle up to deer. Other traits will appear in the course of this narrative; but it may be noted here that he was a voracious reader and in the long winter nights had amassed a store of varied knowledge, which was patently improving his master's mind. Archie was accustomed to quote him for most of his views on matters other than ornithology and war.

'Do you mind going over to that corner and shuffling these slips? Now, John, you draw first.'

Mr. Palliser-Yeates extracted a slip from Lithgow's massive hand.

'Glenraden,' he cried. 'Whew! I'm for it this time.'

Leithen drew next. His slip read Strathlarrig.

'Thank God, I've got old Claybody,' said Lamancha. 'Unless you want him very badly, Ned?'

Leithen shook his head. 'I'm content. It would be a bad start to change the draw.'

'Sit down, Wattie,' said Archie. 'Here's a dram for you. We've summoned you to a consultation. I dare say you've been wonderin' what all this fuss about secrecy has meant. I'm goin' to tell you. You were with Jim Tarras, and you've often told me about his poachin'. Well, these three gentlemen want to have a try at the same game. They're tired of ordinary sport, and want something more excitin'. It wouldn't do, of course, for them to appear under their real names, so they've invented a *nom de guerre* — that's a bogus name, you know.

They call themselves collectively, as you might say, John Macnab. John Macnab writes from London to three proprietors, same as Jim Tarras used to do, and proposes to take a deer or a salmon on their property within certain dates. There's a copy of the letter, and here are the replies that arrived to-night. Just you read 'em.'

Lithgow, without moving a muscle of his face, took the documents. He nodded approvingly over the original letter. He smiled broadly at Colonel Raden's epistle, puzzled a little at Mr. Bandicott's, and wrinkled his brows over that of the Edinburgh solicitors. Then he stared into the fire, and emitted short grunts which might have equally well been chuckles or groans.

'Well, what do you think of the chances?' asked Archie at length.

'Would the gentlemen be good shots?' asked Lithgow.

'Mr. Palliser-Yeates, who has drawn Glenraden, is a very good shot,' Archie replied, 'and he has stalked on nearly every forest in Scotland. Lord Lamancha — Charles, you're pretty good, aren't you?'

'Fair,' was the answer. 'Good on my day.'

'And Sir Edward Leithen is a considerable artist on the river. Now, Wattie, you understand that they want to win — want to get the stags and the salmon — but it's absolute sheer naked necessity that, whether they fail or succeed, they mustn't be caught. John Macnab must remain John Macnab, an unknown blighter from London. You know who Lord Lamancha is, but perhaps you don't know that Sir Edward Leithen is a great lawyer, and Mr. Palliser-Yeates is one of the biggest bankers in the country.'

‘I ken all about the gentlemen,’ said Lithgow gravely. ‘I was readin’ Mr. Yeates’s letter in the “Times” about the debt we was owin’ America, and I mind fine Sir Edward’s speeches in Parliament about the Irish Constitution. I didna altogether agree with him.’

‘Good for you, Wattie. You see, then, how desperately important it is that the thing shouldn’t get out. Mr. Tarras didn’t much care if he was caught, but if John Macnab is uncovered there will be a high and holy row. Now you grasp the problem, and you’ve got to pull up your socks and think it out. I don’t want your views to-night, but I should like to have your notion of the chances in a general way. What’s the bettin’? Twenty to one against?’

‘Mair like a thousand,’ said Lithgow grimly. ‘It will be verra verra difficult. It will want a deal o’ thinkin’.’ Then he added, ‘Mr. Tarras was an awfu’ grand shot. He would kill a runnin’ beast at fower hundred yards — aye, he could make certain of it.’

‘Good Lord, I’m not in that class,’ Palliser-Yeates exclaimed.

‘Aye, and he was more than a grand shot. He could creep up to a sleepin’ beast in the dark and pit a knife in its throat. The sauvages in Africa had learned him that. There was plenty o’ times when him and me were out that it wasna possible to use the rifle.’

‘We can’t compete there,’ said Lamancha dolefully.

‘But I wad not say it was impossible,’ Lithgow added more briskly; ‘it will want a deal o’ thinkin’. It might be done on Haripol — I wadna say but it might be done, but yon auld man at Glenraden will be ill to get the better of. And the Strathlarrig water is an easy water to watch.

Ye'll be for only takin' shootable beasts, like Mr. Tarras, and ye'll not be wantin' to cleek a fish? It might be not so hard to get a wee staggie, or to sniggle a salmon in one of the deep pots.'

'No, we must play the game by the rules. We're not poachers.'

'Then it will be verra verra difficult.'

'You understand,' put in Lamancha, 'that, though we count on your help, you yourself mustn't be suspected. It's as important for you as for us to avoid suspicion, for if they got you it would implicate your master, and that mustn't happen on any account.'

'I ken that. It will be verra verra difficult. I said the odds were a thousand to one, but I think ten thousand wad be liker the thing.'

'Well, go and sleep on it, and we'll see you in the morning. And tell your wife I don't want any boys comin' up to the house with fish. She must send elsewhere and buy 'em. Good-night, Wattie.'

When Lithgow had withdrawn, the four men sat silent and meditative in their chairs. One would rise now and then and knock out his pipe, but scarcely a word was spoken. It is to be presumed that the thoughts of each were on the task in hand, but Leithen's must have wandered. 'By the way, Archie,' he said, 'I saw a very pretty girl on the road this afternoon, riding a yellow pony. Who could she be?'

'Lord knows!' said Archie. 'Probably one of the Raden girls. I haven't seen 'em yet.'

When the clock struck eleven Sir Archie arose and ordered his guests to bed.

'I think my toothache is gone,' he said, switching off

his turban and revealing a ruffled head and scarlet cheek. Then he muttered: 'A thousand to one! Ten thousand to one! It can't be done, you know. We've got to find some way of shortenin' the odds!'

CHAPTER III

RECONNAISSANCE

ROSY-FINGERED DAWN, when, attended with mild airs and a sky of Italian blue, she looked in at Crask next morning, found two members of the household already astir. Mr. Palliser-Yeates, coerced by Wattie Lithgow, was starting with bitter self-condemnation to prospect what his guidē called 'the yont side o' Glenraden.' A quarter of an hour later, Lamancha, armed with a map and a telescope, departed alone for the crest of hill behind which lay the Haripol forest. After that, peace fell on the place, and it was not till the hour of ten that Sir Edward Leithen descended for breakfast.

The glory of the morning had, against his convictions, made him cheerful. The place smelt so good within and without, Mrs. Lithgow's scones were so succulent, the bacon so crisp, and Archie, healed of the toothache, was so preposterous and mirthful a figure that Leithen found a faint zest again in the contemplation of the future. When Archie advised him to get busy about the Larrig, he did not complain, but accompanied his host to the gun-room where he studied attentively on a large-scale map the three miles of the stream in the tenancy of Mr. Bandicott.

It seemed to him that he had better equip himself for the part by some simple disguise, so, declining Archie's suggestion of a kilt, he returned to his bedroom to refit. Obviously the best line was the tourist, so he donned a stiff white shirt and a stiff dress collar with a tartan bow-

tie contributed from Sime's wardrobe. Light brown boots in which he had travelled from London took the place of his nailed shoes, and his thick knickerbocker stockings bulged out above them. Sime's watch-chain, from which depended a football club medal, a vulgar green Homburg hat of Archie's, and a camera slung on his shoulders, completed the equipment. His host surveyed him with approval.

'The Blackpool season is beginning,' he observed. 'You're the born tripper, my lad. Don't forget the picture post-cards.' A bicycle was found, and the late Attorney-General zigzagged warily down the steep road to the Larrig Bridge.

He entered the highway without seeing a human soul, and according to plan turned down the glen towards Inverlarrig. There at the tiny post-office he bought the regulation picture post-cards, and conversed in what he imagined to be the speech of Cockaigne with the aged postmistress. He was eloquent on the beauties of the weather and the landscape and not reticent as to his personal affairs. He was, he said, a seeker for beauty-spots, and had heard that the best were to be found in the demesne of Strathlarrig. 'It's private grund,' he was told, 'but there's Americans bidin' there and they're kind folk and awfu' free with their siller. If ye ask at the lodge, they'll maybe let ye in to photograph.' The sight of an array of ginger-beer bottles inspired him to further camouflage, so he purchased two which he stuck in his side-pockets.

East of the Bridge of Larrig he came to the chasm in the river, above which he knew began the Strathlarrig water. The first part was a canal-like stretch

among bogs, which promised ill for fishing; but beyond a spit of rock the Larrig curled in towards the road edge, and ran in noble pools and swift streams under the shadow of great pines. This Leithen knew, from the map, was the Wood of Larrigmore, a remnant of the ancient Caledonian Forest. By the water's edge the covert was dark, but towards the roadside, the trees thinned out, and the ground was delicately carpeted with heather and thymy turf. There grazed an aged white pony, and a few yards off, on the shaft of a dilapidated fish-cart, sat a small boy.

Leithen, leaning his bicycle against a tree, prospected the murky pools with the air rather of an angler than a photographer, and in the process found his stiff shirt and collar a vexation. Also the ginger-beer bottles bobbed unpleasantly at his side. So, catching sight of the boy, he beckoned him near. 'Do you like ginger-beer?' he asked, and in reply to a vigorous nod bestowed the pair on him. The child returned like a dog to the shelter of the cart, whence might have been presently heard the sound of gluttonous enjoyment. Leithen, having satisfied himself that no mortal could take a fish in that thicket, continued upstream till he struck the wall of the Strathlarrig domain and a vast castellated lodge.

The lodge-keeper made no objection when he sought admittance, and he turned from the gravel drive towards the river, which now flowed through a rough natural park. For a fisherman it was the water of his dreams. The pools were long and shelving, with a strong stream at the head and, below, precisely the right kind of boulders and outjutting banks to shelter fish. There were three of these pools — 'The Duke's,' the 'Black Scour,'

and 'Davie's Pot,' were the names Archie had told him — and beyond, almost under the windows of the house, 'Lady Maisie's,' conspicuous for its dwarf birches and the considerable waterfall above it. Here he made believe to take a photograph, though he had no idea how a camera worked, and reflected dismally upon the magnitude of his task. The whole place was as bright and open as the Horse Guards Parade. The house commanded all four pools, which he knew to be the best, and even at midnight, with the owner unsuspecting, poaching would be nearly impossible. What would it be when the owner was warned, and legitimate methods of fishing were part of the contract?

After a glance at the house, which seemed to be deep in noontide slumber, he made his inconspicuous way past the end of a formal garden to a reach where the Larrig flowed wide and shallow over pebbles. Then came a belt of firs, and then a long tract of broken water which was obviously not a place to hold salmon. He realised, from his memory of the map, that he must be near the end of the Strathlarrig beat, for the topmost mile was a series of unfishable linns. But presently he came to a noble pool. It lay in a meadow where the hay had just been cut, and was liker a bit of Tweed or Eden than a Highland stream. Its shores were low and on the near side edged with fine gravel, the far bank was a green rise unspoiled by scrub, the current entered it with a proud swirl, washed the high bank, and spread itself out in a beautifully broken tail, so that every yard of it spelled fish. Leithen stared at it with appreciative eyes. The back of a moving monster showed in mid-stream, and automatically he raised his arm in an imaginary cast.

The next second he observed a man walking across the meadow towards him, and remembered his character. Directing his camera hastily at the butt-end of a black-faced sheep on the opposite shore, he appeared to be taking a careful photograph, after which he restored the apparatus to its case and turned to reconnoitre the stranger. This proved to be a middle-aged man in ancient tweed knickerbockers of an outrageous pattern known locally as the 'Strathlarrig tartan.' He was obviously a river-keeper, and was advancing with a resolute and minatory air.

Leithen took off his hat with a flourish.

'Have I the honour, sir, to address the owner of this lovely spot?' he asked in what he hoped was the true accent of a tripper.

The keeper stopped short and regarded him sternly.

'What are ye daein' here?' he demanded.

'Picking up a few pictures, sir. I inquired at your lodge, and was told that I might presume upon your indulgence. Pardon me, if I 'ave presumed too far. If I 'ad known that the proprietor was at 'and I would have sought 'im out and addressed my 'umble request to 'imself.'

The keeper was thawing under this humility.

'Ye're makin' a mistake. I'm no the laird. The laird's awa' about India. But Mr. Bandicott — that's him that's the tenant — has given strict orders that naebody's to gang near the watter. I wonder Mactavish at the lodge hadna mair sense.'

'I fear the blame is mine,' said the agreeable tourist. 'I only asked leave to enter the grounds, but the beauty of the scenery attracted me to the river. Never 'ave I

seen a more exquisite spot.' He waved his arm towards the pool.

'It's no that bad. But ye maun awa' out o' this. Ye'd better gang by the back road, for fear they see ye frae the Hoose.'

Leithen followed him obediently, after presenting him with a cigarette, which he managed to extract without taking his case from his pocket. It should have been a fag, he reflected, and not one of Archie's special Egyptians. As they walked, he conversed volubly.

'What's the name of the river?' he asked. 'Is it the Strathlarrig?'

'No. It's the Larrig, and that bit you like sae weel is the "Minister's Pool." There's no a pool like it in Scotland.'

'I believe you. There is not,' was the enthusiastic reply.

'I mean for fish. Ye'll no ken muckle aboot fishin'.'

'I've done a bit of anglin' at 'ome. What do you catch here? Jack and Perch?'

'Jack and Perch!' cried the keeper scornfully. 'Saumon, man. Saumon up to thirty pounds' wecht.'

'Oh, of course, salmon. That must be a glorious sport. But a friend of mine, who has seen it done, told me it wasn't 'ard. He said that even I could catch a salmon.'

'Mair like a saumon wad catch you. Now, you haud down the back road, and you'll come out aside the lodge gate. And dinna you come here again. The orders is strict, and if auld Angus was to get a grip o' ye, I wadna say what wad happen, Guid day to ye, and dinna stop till ye're out o' the gates.'

Leithen did as he was bid, circumnavigated the house,

struck a farm track, and in time reached the highroad. It was a very doleful tourist who trod the wayside heather past the Wood of Larrigmore. Never had he seen a finer stretch of water or one so impregnably defended. No bluff or ingenuity would avail an illicit angler on that open greensward, with every keeper mobilised and on guard. He thought less now of the idiocy of the whole proceeding, than of the folly of plunging in the dark upon just that piece of river. There were many streams where Jim Tarras's feat might be achieved, but he had chosen the one stretch in all Scotland where it was starkly impossible.

The recipient of the ginger-beer was still sitting by the shafts of his cart. He seemed to be lunching, for he was carving attentively a hunk of cheese and a loaf-end with a gully-knife. As he looked up from his task, Leithen saw a child of perhaps twelve summers with a singularly alert and impudent eye, a much-freckled face, and a thatch of tow-coloured hair bleached almost white by the sun. His feet were bare, his trousers were those of a grown man, tucked up at the knees and hitched up almost under his armpits, and for a shirt he appeared to have a much-torn jersey. Weather had tanned his whole appearance into the blend of greys and browns which one sees on a hillside boulder. The boy nodded gravely to Leithen, and continued to munch.

Below the wood lay the half-mile where the Larrig wound sluggishly through a bog before precipitating itself into the chasm above the Bridge of Larrig. Leithen left his bicycle by the roadside and crossed the waste of hag and tussocks to the water's edge. It looked a thankless place for the angler. The clear streams of the Larrig

seemed to have taken on the colour of their banks, and to drowse dark and deep and sullen in one gigantic peat-hole. In spite of the rain of yesterday there was little current. The place looked oily, stagnant, and unfishable — a tract through which salmon after mounting the fall would hurry to the bright pools above.

Leithen sat down in a clump of heather and lit his pipe. Something might be done with a worm after a spate, he considered, but any other lure was out of the question. The place had its merits for every purpose but taking salmon. It was a part of the Strathlarrig water outside the park pale, and it was so hopeless that it was not likely to be carefully patrolled. The highroad, it was true, ran near, but it was little frequented. If only. . . . He suddenly sat up, and gazed intently at a ripple on the dead surface. Surely that was a fish on the move. . . . He kept his eyes on the river, until he saw something else which made him rub them, and fall into deep reflection. . . .

He was roused by a voice at his shoulder.

‘What for will they no let me come up to Crask ony mair?’ the voice demanded in a sort of tinkler’s whine. Leithen turned and found the boy of the ginger-beer.

‘Hullo! You oughtn’t to do that, my son. You’ll give people heart disease. What was it you asked?’

‘What . . . for . . . will . . . they . . . no . . . let . . . me come . . . up to Crask . . . ony mair?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know. What’s Crask?’

‘Ye ken it fine. It’s the big hoose up the hill. I seen you come down frae it yoursel’ this mornin’.’

Leithen was tempted to deny this allegation and assert his title of tourist, but something in the extreme intelligence of the boy’s face suggested that such a course

might be dangerous. Instead he said: 'Tell me your name, and what's your business at Crask?'

'My name's Benjamin Bogle, but I get Fish Benjie frae most folk. I've sell't haddies and flukes to Crask these twa months. But this mornin' I was tell't no to come back, and when I speired what way, the auld wife shut the door on me.'

A recollection of Sir Archie's order the night before returned to Leithen's mind, and with it a great sense of insecurity. The argus-eyed child, hot with a grievance, had seen him descend from Crask, and was therefore in a position to give away the whole show. What chance was there for secrecy with this malevolent scout hanging around?

'Where do you live, Benjie?'

'I bide in my cairt. My father's in jyle, and my mither's lyin' badly in Muirtown. I sell fish to a' the gentry.'

'And you want to know why you can't sell them at Crask?'

'Aye, I wad like to ken that. The auld wife used to be a kind body and gie me jeely pieces. What's turned her into a draygon?'

Leithen was accustomed, in the duties of his profession, to quick decisions on tactics, and now he took one which was destined to be momentous.

'Benjie,' he said solemnly, 'there's a lot of things in the world that I don't understand, and it stands to reason that there must be more that you don't. I'm in a position in which I badly want somebody to help me. I like the look of you. You look a trusty fellow and a keen one. Is all your time taken up selling haddies?'

'Deed no. Just twa hours in the mornin', and twa hours at nicht when I gang down to the cobles at Inverlarrig. I've a heap o' time on my hands.'

'Good. I think I can promise that you may resume your trade at Crask. But first I want you to do a job for me. There's a bicycle lying by the roadside. Bring it up to Crask this evening between six and seven. Have you a watch?'

'No, but I can tell the time braw and fine.'

'Go to the stables and wait for me there. I want to have a talk with you.' Leithen produced half-a-crown, on which the grubby paw of Fish Benjie instantly closed.

'And look here, Benjie. You haven't seen me here, or anybody like me. Above all, you didn't see me come down from Crask this morning. If anybody asks you questions, you only saw a man on a bicycle on the road to Inverlarrig.'

The boy nodded, and his solemn face flickered for a second with an impish smile.

'Well, that's a bargain.' Leithen got up from his couch and turned down the river, making for the Bridge of Larrig, where the highway crossed. He looked back once, and saw Fish Benjie wheeling his bicycle into the undergrowth of the wood. He was in two minds as to whether he had done wisely in placing himself in the hands of a small ragamuffin, who for all he knew might be hand-in-glove with the Strathlarrig keepers. But the recollection of Benjie's face reassured him. He did not look like a boy who would be the pet of any constituted authority; he had the air rather of the nomad against whom the orderly world waged war. There had been an impish honesty in his face, and Leithen, who had a weakness for

disreputable urchins, felt that he had taken the right course. Besides, the young sleuth-hound had got on his trail, and there had been nothing for it but to make him an ally.

He crossed the bridge, avoided the Crask road, and struck uphill by a track which followed the ravine of a burn. As he walked his mind went back to a stretch on a Canadian river, a stretch of still, unruffled water warmed all day by a July sun. It had been as full as it could hold of salmon, but no artifice of his could stir them. There in the late afternoon had come an aged man from Boston, who fished with a light trout rod and cast a deft line, and placed a curious little dry fly several feet above a fish's snout. Then, by certain strange manœuvres, he had drawn the fly under water. Leithen had looked on and marvelled, while before sunset that ancient man hooked and landed seven good fish. . . . Somehow that bit of shining sun-flecked Canadian river reminded him of the unpromising stretch of the Larrig he had just been reconnoitring.

At a turn of the road he came upon his host, tramping homeward in the company of a most unprepossessing hound. I pause for an instant to introduce Mackenzie. He was a mongrel collie of the old Highland stock, known as 'beardies,' and his tousled head, not unlike an extra-shaggy Dandie Dinmont's, was set upon a body of immense length, girth and muscle. His manners were atrocious to all except his master, and local report accused him of every canine vice except worrying sheep. He had been christened the 'Bluidy Mackenzie,' after a noted persecutor of the godly, by some one whose knowledge of history was greater than Sir Archie's, for the

latter never understood the allusion. The name, however, remained his official one; commonly he was addressed as 'Mackenzie,' but in moments of expansion he was referred to by his master as 'Old Bloody.'

The said master seemed to be in a strange mood. He was dripping wet, having apparently fallen into the river, but his spirits soared, and he kept on smiling in a light-headed way. He scarcely listened to Leithen, when he told him of his compact with Fish Benjie. 'I dare say it will be all right,' he observed idiotically. 'Is your idea to pass off one of his haddies as a young salmon to the guileless Bandicott?'

For an explanation of Sir Archie's conduct the chronicler must retrace his steps.

After Leithen's departure it had seemed good to him to take the air, so, summoning Mackenzie from a dark lair in the yard, he made his way to the river — the beat below the bridge and beyond the highroad, which was on Crask ground. There it was a broad brawling water boulder-strewn and shallow, which an active man could cross dry-shod by natural stepping-stones. Sir Archie sat for a time on the near shore, listening to the sandpipers — birds which were his special favourites — and watching the whinchats on the hillside and the flashing white breasts of the water ousels. Mackenzie lay beside him, an uneasy sphinx, tormented by a distant subtle odour of badger.

Presently Sir Archie arose and stepped out on a half-submerged boulder. He was getting very proud of the way he had learned to manage his game leg, and it occurred to him that here was a chance of testing his balance. If he could hop across on the stones to the other

side, he might regard himself as an able-bodied man. Balancing himself with his stick as a rope-dancer uses his pole, he in due course reached the middle of the current. After that it was more difficult, for the stones were smaller, and the stream more rapid, but with an occasional splash and flounder he landed safely, to be saluted with a shower of spray from Mackenzie, who had taken the deep-water route.

‘Not so bad that for a crock,’ he told himself, as he lay full length in the sun watching the faint line of the Haripol hills overtopping the ridge of Crask.

Half an hour was spent in idleness till the dawning of hunger warned him to return. The crossing as seen from this side looked more formidable, for the first stones could be reached only by jumping a fairly broad stretch of current. Yet the jump was achieved, and with renewed confidence Sir Archie essayed the more solid boulders. All would have gone well had not he taken his eyes from the stones and observed on the bank beyond a girl’s figure. She had been walking by the stream and had stopped to stare at the portent of his performance. Now Sir Archie was aware that his style of jumping was not graceful and he was discomposed by this sudden gallery. Nevertheless, the thing was so easy that he could scarcely have failed had it not been for the faithful Mackenzie. That animal had resolved to follow his master’s footsteps, and was jumping steadily behind him. But three boulders from the shore they jumped simultaneously, and there was not standing-room for both. Sir Archie, already nervous, slipped, recovered himself, slipped again, and then, accompanied by Mackenzie, subsided noisily into three feet of water.

He waded ashore to find himself faced by a girl, in whose face concern struggled with amusement. He lifted a dripping hat and grinned

‘Silly exhibition, wasn’t it? All the fault of Mackenzie! Idiotic brute of a dog, not to remember my game leg!’

‘You’re horribly wet,’ the girl said, ‘but it was sporting of you to try that crossing. What about dry clothes?’

‘Oh, no trouble about that. I’ve only to get up to Crask.’

‘You’re Sir Archibald Roylance, aren’t you? I’m Janet Raden. I’ve been with Papa to call on you, but you’re never at home.’

Sir Archie, having now got the water out of his eyes, was able to regard his interlocutor. He saw a slight girl with what seemed to him astonishingly bright hair and very blue and candid eyes. She appeared to be anxious about his dry clothes, for she led the way up the bank at a great pace, while he limped behind her. Suddenly she noticed the limp.

‘Oh, please forgive me, I forgot about your leg. You had another smash, hadn’t you, besides the one in the War — steeplechasing, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes, but it didn’t signify. I’m all right again and get about anywhere, but I’m a bit slow on the wing, you know.’

‘You’re keen about horses?’

‘Love ’em.’

‘So do I. Agatha — that’s my sister — doesn’t care a bit about them. She would like to live all the year at Glenraden, but — I’m ashamed to say it — I would rather have a foggy November in Warwickshire than August in Scotland. I simply dream of hunting.’

The ardent eyes and the young grace of the girl seemed marvellous things to Sir Archie. 'I expect you go uncommon well,' he murmured.

'No, only moderate. I only get scratch mounts. You see I stay with my Aunt Barbara, and she's too old to hunt, and has nothing in her stables but camels. But this year. . . .' She broke off as she caught sight of the pools forming round Sir Archie's boots. 'I mustn't keep you here talking. You be off home at once.'

'Don't worry about me. I'm wet for days on end when I'm watchin' birds in the spring. You were sayin' about this year?'

Her answer was a surprising question. 'Do you know anybody called John Macnab?'

Sir Archibald Roylance was a resourceful mountebank and did not hesitate.

'Yes. The distiller, you mean? Dhuinewassel Whiskey? I've seen his advertisements — "*They drink Dhuinewassel, In cottage and castle* —" That chap?'

'No, no, somebody quite different. Listen, please, if you're not too wet, for I want you to help me. Papa has had the most extraordinary letter from somebody called John Macnab, saying he means to kill a stag in our forest between certain dates, and daring us to prevent him. He is going to hand over the beast to us if he gets it and pay fifty pounds, but if he fails he is to pay a hundred pounds. Did you ever hear of such a thing?'

'Some infernal swindler,' said Archie darkly.

'No. He can't be. You see the fifty pounds arrived this morning.'

'God bless my soul!'

'Yes. In Bank of England notes, posted from London.'

Papa at first wanted to tell him to go to — well, where Papa tells people he doesn't like to go. But I thought the offer so sporting that I persuaded him to take up the challenge. Indeed, I wrote the reply myself. Mr. Macnab said that the money was to go to a charity, so Agatha is having the fifty pounds for her native weaving and dyeing — she's frightfully keen about that. But if we win the other fifty pounds, Papa says the best charity he can think of is to prevent me breaking my neck on hirelings, and I'm to have it to buy a hunter. So I'm very anxious to find out about Mr. John Macnab.'

'Probably some rich Colonial who hasn't learned manners.'

'I don't think so. His manners are very good, to judge by his letter. I think he is a gentleman, but perhaps a little mad. We simply *must* beat him, for I've got to have that fifty pounds. And — and I want you to help me.'

'Oh, well, you know — I mean to say — I'm not much of a fellow.'

'You're very clever, and you've done all kinds of things. I feel that if you advised us we should win easily, for I'm sure you had far harder jobs in the War.'

To have a pretty young woman lauding his abilities and appealing with melting eyes for his aid was a new experience in Sir Archie's life. It was so delectable an experience that he almost forgot its awful complications. When he remembered them, he flushed and stammered.

'Really, I'd love to, but I wouldn't be any earthly good. I'm an old crock, you see. But you needn't worry — your Glenraden gillies will make short work of this bandit. . . . By Jove, I hope you get your hunter, Miss Raden.'

You've got to have it somehow. Tell you what, if I've any bright idea I'll let you know.'

'Thank you so much. And may I consult you if I'm in difficulties?'

'Yes, of course. I mean to say, No. Hang it, I don't know, for I don't like interferin' with your father's challenge.'

'That means you will. Now, you mustn't wait another moment. Good-bye. Will you come over to lunch at Glenraden?'

Then she broke off and stared at him. 'I forgot. Haven't you smallpox?'

'What! Smallpox? Oh, I see! Has old Mother Claybody been putting that about?'

'She came to tea yesterday twittering with terror, and warned us all not to go within a mile of Crask.'

Sir Archie laughed somewhat hollowly. 'I had a bad toothache and my head tied up, and I dare say I said something silly, but I never thought she would take it for gospel. You see for yourself that I've nothing the matter with me.'

'You'll soon have pneumonia the matter with you, unless you hurry home. Good-bye. We'll expect you to lunch the day after to-morrow.' And with a wave of her hand she was gone.

The extraordinary fact was that Sir Archie was not depressed by the new tangle which encumbered him. On the contrary, he was in the best of spirits. He hobbled gaily up the by-road to Crask, listened to Leithen, when he met him, with less than half an ear, and was happy with his own thoughts. I am at a loss to know how to describe the first shattering impact of youth and

beauty on a susceptible mind. The old plan was to borrow the language of the world's poetry, the new seems to be to have recourse to the difficult jargon of psychologists and physicians; but neither, I fear, would suit Sir Archie's case. He did not think of nymphs and goddesses or of linnets in spring; still less did he plunge into the depths of a subconscious self which he was not aware of possessing. The unromantic epithet which rose to his lips was 'jolly.' This was for certain the jolliest girl he had ever met — regular young sportswoman and amazingly good-lookin', and he was dashed if she wouldn't get her hunter. For a delirious ten minutes, which carried him to the edge of the Crask lawn, he pictured his resourcefulness placed at her service, her triumphant success, and her bright-eyed gratitude.

Then he suddenly remembered that alliance with Miss Janet Raden was treachery to his three guests. The aid she had asked for could only be given at the expense of John Macnab. He was in the miserable position of having a leg in both camps, of having unhappily received the confidences of both sides, and whatever he did he must make a mess of it. He could not desert his friends, so he must fail the lady; wherefore there could be no luncheon for him the day after to-morrow, since another five minutes' talk with her would entangle him beyond hope. There was nothing for it but to have a return of smallpox. He groaned aloud.

'A twinge of that beastly toothache,' he explained in reply to his companion's enquiry.

When the party met in the smoking-room that night after dinner, two very weary men occupied the deepest

armchairs. Lamancha was struggling with sleep; Palliser-Yeates was limp with fatigue, far too weary to be sleepy. 'I've had the devil of a day,' said the latter; 'Wattie took me at a racing gallop about thirty miles over bogs and crags. Lord! I'm stiff and footsore. I believe I crawled more than ten miles, and I've no skin left on my knees. But we spied the deuce of a lot of ground, and I see my way to the rudiments of a plan. You start off, Charles, while I collect my thoughts.'

But Lamancha was supine.

'I'm too drunk with sleep to talk,' he said. 'I prospected all the south side of Haripol — all this side of the Reascuill, you know. I got a good spy from Sgurr Mor, and I tried to get up Sgurr Dearg, but stuck on the rocks. That's a fearsome mountain, if you like. Didn't see a blessed soul all day — no rifles out — but I heard a shot from the Machray ground. I got my glasses on to several fine beasts. It struck me that the best chance would be the corrie between Sgurr Mor and Sgurr Dearg — there's a nice low beallach at the head to get a stag through and the place is rather tucked away from the rest of the forest. That's as far as I've got at present. I want to sleep.'

Palliser-Yeates was in a very different mood. With an Ordnance map spread out on his knees he expounded the result of his researches, waving his pipe excitedly.

'It's a stiff problem, but there's just the ghost of a chance. Wattie admitted that on the way home. Look here, you fellows — Glenraden is divided, like Gaul, into three parts. There's the Home beat — all the low ground of the Raden glen and the little hills behind the house. Then there's the Carnbeg beat to the east, which is the best, I fancy — very easy going, not very high, and

with peat roads and tracks where you could shift a beast. Last there's Carnmore, miles from anywhere, with all the highest tops and as steep as Torridon. It would be the devil of a business, if I got a stag there, to move it. Wattie and I went round the whole marches, mostly on our bellies. No, we weren't seen — Wattie took care of that. What a noble *shikari* the old chap is!

'Well, what's your conclusion?' Leithen asked.

Palliser-Yeates shook his head. 'That's just where I'm stumped. Try to put yourself in old Raden's place. He has only one stalker and two gillies for the whole forest, for he's very short-handed, and as a matter of fact he stalks his beasts himself. He'll consider where John Macnab is likeliest to have his try, and he'll naturally decide on the Carnmore beat, for that's by far the most secluded. You may take it from me that he has only enough men to watch one beat properly. But he'll reflect that John Macnab has got to get his stag away, and he'll wonder how he'll manage it on Carnmore, for there's only one bad track up from Inverlarrig. Therefore, he'll conclude that John Macnab may be more likely to try Carnbeg, though it's a bit more public. You see, his decision isn't any easier than mine. On the whole I'm inclined to think he'll plump for Carnmore, for he must think John Macnab a fairly desperate fellow who will aim first at killing his stag in peace, and will trust to Providence for the rest. So at the moment I favour Carnbeg.'

Leithen wrinkled his brow. 'There are three of us,' he said. 'That gives us a chance of a little finesse. What about letting Charles or me make a demonstration against Carnmore, while you wait at Carnbeg?'

‘Good idea! I thought of that too.’

‘You’d better assume Colonel Raden to be in very full possession of his wits,’ Leithen continued. ‘The simple bluff won’t do — he’ll see through it. He’ll think that John Macnab is the same wary kind of old bird as himself. I found out in the War that it didn’t do to under-rate your opponent’s brains. He’s pretty certain to expect a feint and not to be taken in. I’m for something a little subtler.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Meaning that you feint in one place, so that your opponent believes it to be a feint and pays no attention — and then you sail in and get to work in that very place.’

Palliser-Yeates whistled. ‘That wants thinking over. . . . How about yourself?’

‘I’ve studied the river, and you never in your life saw such a hopeless proposition. All the good pools are as open as the Serpentine. Wattie stated the odds correctly.’

‘Nothing doing there?’

‘Nothing doing, unless I take steps to shorten the odds. So I’ve taken in a partner.’

The others stared, and even Lamancha woke up.

‘Yes. I interviewed him in the stable before dinner. It’s the little ragamuffin who sells fish — Fish Benjie is the name he goes by. Archie, I hope you don’t mind, but I told him to resume his morning visits. They’re my best chance for consultations.’

‘You’re takin’ a pretty big risk, Ned,’ said his host. ‘D’you mean to say you’ve let that boy into the whole secret?’

‘I’ve told him everything. It was the only way, for he

had begun to suspect. I admit it's a gamble, but I believe I can trust the child. I think I know a sportsman when I see him.'

Archie still shook his head. 'There's something else I may as well tell you. I met one of the Raden girls to-day — the younger — she was on the bank when I fell into the Larrig. She asked me point-blank if I knew anybody called John Macnab?'

Lamancha was wide awake. 'What did you say?' he asked sharply.

'Oh, lied of course. Said I supposed she meant the distiller. Then she told me the whole story — said she had written the letter her father signed. She's mad keen to win the extra fifty quid, for it means a hunter for her this winter down in Warwickshire. Yes, and she asked me to help. I talked a lot of rot about my game leg and that sort of thing, but I sort of promised to go and lunch at Glenraden the day after to-morrow.'

'That's impossible,' said Lamancha.

'I know it is, but there's only one way out of it. I've got to have smallpox again.'

'You've got to go to bed and stay there for a month,' said Palliser-Yeates severely. 'Now, look here, Archie. We simply can't have you getting mixed up with the enemy, especially the enemy women. You're much too susceptible and far too great an ass.'

'Of course not,' said Sir Archie, with a touch of protest in his voice. 'I see that well enough, but it's a black lookout for me. I wish to Heaven you fellows had chosen to take your cure somewhere else. I'm simply wreckin' all my political career. I had a letter from my agent to-night, and I should be tourin' the constituency instead of

playin' the goat here. All I've got to say is that you've a dashed lot more than old Raden against you. You've got that girl, crazy about her hunter, and any one can see that she's as clever as a monkey.'

But the Laird of Crask was not thinking of Miss Janet Raden's wits as he went meditatively to bed. He was wondering why her eyes were so blue, and as he ascended the stairs he thought he had discovered the reason. Her hair was spun-gold, but she had dark eyelashes.

CHAPTER IV

FISH BENJIE

ON the roads of the north of Scotland, any time after the last snow-wreaths have melted behind the dikes, you will meet a peculiar kind of tinkler. They are not the copper-nosed scarecrows of the Lowlands, sullen and cringing, attended by sad infants in ramshackle perambulators. Nor are they in any sense gipsies, for they have not the Romany speech or colouring. They travel the roads with an establishment, usually a covered cart and one or more lean horses, and you may find their encampments any day by any burnside. Of a rainy night you can see their queer little tents, shaped like a segment of a sausage, with a fire hissing at the door and the horses cropping the roadside grass; of a fine morning the women will be washing their duds on the loch shore and their young fighting like ferrets among the shingle. You will meet with them in the back streets of the little towns, and at the back doors of wayside inns, but mostly in sheltered hollows of the moor or green nooks among the birches, for they are artists in choosing camping-grounds. They are children of Esau who combine a dozen crafts — tinkering, fish-hawking, besom-making and the like — with their natural trades of horse-coping and poaching. At once brazen and obsequious, they beg rather as an art than a necessity; they will whine to a keeper with pockets full of pheasants' eggs, and seek permission to camp from a laird with a melting tale of hardships, while one of his salmon lies

hidden in the bracken on their cart floor. The men are an upstanding race, keen-eyed, resourceful, with humour in their cunning; the women, till the life bears too hardly on them, are handsome and soft-spoken; and the children are burned and weathered like imps of the desert. Their speech is neither Lowland nor Highland, but a sing-song Scots of their own, and if they show the Celt in their secret ways there is a hint of Norse blood in the tawny hair and blue eyes so common among them.

Ebenezer Bogle was born into the life, and for fifty-five years travelled the roads from the Reay country to the Mearns and from John o' Groats to the sea-lochs of Ap-pin. Sickness overtook him one October when camped in the Black Isle, and, feeling the hand of death on him, he sent for two people. One was the nearest Free Kirk minister — for Ebenezer was theologically of the old school; the other was a banker from Muirtown. What he said to the minister I do not know; but what the banker said to him may be gathered from the fact that he informed his wife before he died that in the Muirtown bank there lay to his credit a sum of nearly three thousand pounds. Ebenezer had been a sober and careful man, and a genius at horse-coping. He had bought the little rough shelties of the North and the Isles, and sold them at Lowland fairs; he had dabbled in black cattle; he had done big trade in sheepskins when a snowstorm decimated the Sutherland flocks, and he had engaged, perhaps, in less reputable ventures, which might be forbidden by the law of the land, but were not contrary, so he believed, to the Bible. Year by year his bank balance had mounted, for he spent little, and now he had a fortune to bequeath. He made no will; all went to his wife, with the understanding

that it would be kept intact for his son; and in this confidence Ebenezer closed his eyes.

The wife did not change her habit of life. The son Benjamin accompanied her as before in the long rounds between May and October, and in the winter abode in the fishing quarter of Muirtown, and intermittently attended school. Presently his mother took a second husband, a Catholic Macdonald from the West, for the road is a lonely occupation for a solitary woman. Her new man was a cheerful being — very little like the provident Ebenezer — much addicted to the bottle and a lover of all things but legitimate trade. But he respected the dead man's wishes and made no attempt to touch the hoard in the Muirtown bank; he was kind, too, to the boy, and taught him many things that are not provided for in the educational system of Scotland. From him Benjie learned how to take a nesting grouse, how to snare a dozen things, from hares to roebuck, how to sniggle salmon in the clear pools, and how to poach a hind when the deer came down in hard weather to the meadows. He learned how to tell the hour by the sun, and to find his way by the stars, and what weather was foretold by the starlings packing at nightfall, or the crows sitting with their beaks to the wind, or a badger coming home after daylight. The boy knew how to make cunning whistles from ash and rowan with which to imitate a snipe's bleat or the call of an otter, and he knew how at all times and in all weathers to fend for himself and find food and shelter. A tough little nomad he became under this tutelage, knowing no boys' games, with scarcely an acquaintance of his age, but able to deal on equal terms with every fisherman, gillie, and tinkler north of the Highland line.

It chanced that in the spring of this year Mrs. Bogle had fallen ill for the first time in her life. It was influenza, and, being neglected, was followed by pneumonia, so that when May came she was in no condition to take the road. By ill luck her husband had been involved in a drunken row, when he had assaulted two of his companions with such violence and success that he was sent for six months to prison. In these circumstances there was nothing for it but that Benjie should set out alone with the cart, and it is a proof of the stoutheartedness of the family tradition that his mother never questioned the propriety of this arrangement. He departed with her blessing, and weekly despatched to her a much-blotted scrawl describing his doings. There was something of his father's hard fibre in the child, for he was a keen bargainer and as wary as a fox against cajolery. He met friends of his family who let him camp beside them, and with their young he did battle, when they dared to threaten his dignity. Benjie fought in no orthodox way, but like a weasel, using every weapon of tooth and claw, but in his sobbing furies he was unconquerable, and was soon left in peace. Presently he found that he preferred to camp alone, so with his old cart and horse he made his way up and down the long glens of the West to the Larrig. There, he remembered, the fish trade had been profitable in past years, so he sat himself down by the roadside to act as middleman between the fishing-cobles of Inverlarrig and the kitchens of the shooting-lodges. It would be untrue to say that this was his only means of livelihood, and I fear that the contents of Benjie's pot, as it bubbled of an evening in the Wood of Larrigmore, would not have borne inspection by any keeper who chanced to

pass. The weekly scrawls went regularly to his now convalescent mother, and once a parcel arrived for him at the Inverlarrig post-office, containing a gigantic new shirt, which he used as a blanket. For the rest, he lived as Robinson Crusoe lived, on the countryside around him, asking no news of the outer world.

On the morning of the 27th of August he might have been seen, a little after seven o'clock, driving his cart up the fine beech avenue which led to Glenraden Castle. It was part of his morning round, but hitherto he had left his cart at the lodge-gate, and carried his fish on foot to the house; wherefore he had some slight argument with the lodge-keeper before he was permitted to enter. He drove circumspectly to the back regions, left his fish at the kitchen door, and then proceeded to the cottage of the stalker, one Macpherson, which stood by itself in a clump of firs. There he waited for some time till Mrs. Macpherson came out to feed her hens. A string of had-docks changed hands, and Benjie was bidden indoors, where he was given a cup of tea, while old Macpherson smoked his early pipe and asked questions. Half an hour later Benjie left, with every sign of amity, and drove very slowly down the woodland road towards the haugh where the Raden, sweeping from the narrows of the glen, spreads into broad pools and shining shallows. There he left the cart and squatted inconspicuously in the heather in a place which commanded a prospect of the home woods. From his observations he was aware that one of the young ladies regularly took her morning walk in this quarter.

Meantime, in the pleasant upstairs dining-room of the Castle breakfast had begun. Colonel Alastair Raden, having read prayers to a row of servants from a chair in

the window — there was a family tradition that he once broke off in a petition to call excitedly his Maker's attention to a capercailzie on the lawn — and having finished his porridge, which he ate standing with bulletins interjected about the weather, was doing good work on bacon and eggs. Breakfast, he used to declare, should consist of no kickshaws like kidneys and omelettes; only bacon and eggs, and plenty of 'em. The master of the house was a lean old gentleman dressed in an ancient loud-patterned tweed jacket and a very faded kilt. Still erect as a post, he had a barrack-square voice, a high-boned, aquiline face, and a kindly but irritable blue eye. His daughters were devoting what time was left to them from attending to the breakfasts of three terriers to an animated discussion of a letter which lay before them. The morning meal at Glenraden was rarely interrupted by correspondence, for the post did not arrive till the evening, but this missive had been delivered by hand.

'He can't come,' the younger cried. 'He says he's seedy again. It may really be smallpox this time.'

'Who can't come, and who has smallpox?' her father demanded.

'Sir Archibald Roylance. I told you I met him and asked him to lunch here to-day. We really ought to get to know our nearest neighbour, and he seems a very pleasant young man.'

'I think he is hiding a dark secret,' said the elder Miss Raden. 'Nobody who calls there ever finds him in — except Lady Claybody, and then he told her he had smallpox. Old Mr. Bandicott said he went up the long hill to Crask yesterday, and found nobody at home, though he was perfectly certain he saw one figure slinking

into the wood and another moving away from a window. I wonder if Sir Archibald is really all right. We don't know anything about him, do we?'

'Of course he's all right — bound to be — dashed gallant, sporting fellow. Sorry he's not coming to luncheon — I want to meet him. He's probably afraid of Nettie, and I don't blame him, for she's a brazen hussy, and he does well to be scared of old Bandicott. I'm scared to death by the fellow myself.'

'You know you've promised to let him dig in the Piper's Ring, Papa.'

'I know I have, and I would have promised to let him dig up my lawn to keep him quiet. Never met a man with such a flow of incomprehensible talk. He had the audacity to tell me that I was no more Celtic than he was, but sprung from some blackguard Norse raiders a thousand years back. Judging by the sketch he gave me of their habits, I'd sooner the Radens were descended from Polish Jews.'

'I thought him a darling,' said his elder daughter, 'and with such a beautiful face.'

'He may be a darling for all I know, but his head is stuffed with maggots. If you admired him so much, why didn't you take him off my hands? I liked the look of the young fellow and wanted to have a word with him. More by token' — the Colonel was hunting about for the marmalade — 'what were you two plotting with him in the corner after dinner?'

'We were talking about John Macnab.'

The Colonel's face became wrathful.

'Then I call it dashed unfilial conduct of you not to have brought me in. There was I, deafened with the

old man's chatter — all about a fellow called Harald Blacktooth or Bottlenose, or some such name, that he swears is buried in my grounds and means to dig up — when I might have been having a really fruitful conversation. What was young Bandicott's notion of John Macnab?'

'Mr. Junius thinks he is a lunatic,' said the elder Miss Raden. She was in every way her sister's opposite, dark of hair and eye, where Janet was fair, tall where Janet was little, slow and quiet of voice where Janet was quick and gusty.

'I entirely differ from him. I think John Macnab is perfectly sane, and probably a good fellow, though a dashed insolent one. What's Bandicott doing about his river?'

'Patrolling it day and night between the 1st and 3d of September. He says he's taking no chances, though he'd bet Wall Street to a nickel that the poor boob hasn't the frozenest outside.'

'Nettie, he said nothing of the kind!' Miss Agatha was indignant. 'He talks beautiful English, with no trace of an accent — all Bostonians do, he told me.'

'Anyhow, he asked what steps we were taking and advised us to get busy. We come before him, you know. ... Heavens, Papa, it begins to-morrow night! Oh, and I did so want to consult Sir Archibald. I'm sure he could help.'

Colonel Raden, having made a satisfactory breakfast, was lighting a pipe.

'You need not worry, my dear. I'm an old campaigner and have planned out the thing thoroughly. I've been in frequent consultation with Macpherson, and yesterday

we had Alan and James Macrae in, and they entirely agreed.'

He produced from his pocket a sheet of foolscap on which had been roughly drawn a map of the estate.

'Now, listen to me. We must assume this fellow Macnab to be in possession of his senses, and to have more or less reconnoitred the ground — though I don't know how the devil he can have managed it, for the gillies have kept their eyes open, and nobody's been seen near the place. Well, here are the three beats. Unless young Bandicott is right and the man's a lunatic, he won't try the Home beat, for the simple reason that a shot there would be heard by twenty people and he could not move a beast twenty yards without being caught. There remain Carnmore and Carnbeg. Macpherson was clear that he would try Carnmore, as being farthest away from the house. But I, with my old campaigning experience' — here Colonel Raden looked remarkably cunning — 'pointed out at once that such reasoning was rudimentary. I said, "He'll bluff us, and just because he thinks that *we* think he'll try Carnmore, he'll try Carnbeg." Therefore, since we can only afford to watch one beat thoroughly, we'll watch Carnbeg. What do you think of that, my dears?'

'I think you're very clever, Papa,' said Agatha. 'I'm sure you're right.'

'And you, Nettie?'

Janet was knitting her brows and looking thoughtful.

'I'm . . . not . . . so . . . sure. You see we must assume that John Macnab is very ingenious. He probably made his fortune in the Colonies by every kind of dodge. He's sure to be very clever.'

'Well, but, my dear,' said her father, 'it's just that cleverness that I propose to match.'

'But do you think you have quite matched it? You have tried to imagine what John Macnab would be thinking, and he will have done just the same by you. Why shouldn't he have guessed the conclusion you have reached and be deciding to go one better?'

'How do you mean, Nettie?' asked her puzzled parent. He was inclined to be annoyed, but experience had taught him that his younger daughter's wits were not to be lightly disregarded.

Nettie took the estate map from his hand and found a stump of pencil in the pocket of her jumper.

'Please look at this, Papa. Here is A and B. B offers a better chance, so Macpherson says John Macnab will take B. You say, acutely, that John Macnab is not a fool, and will try to bluff us by taking A. I say that John Macnab will have anticipated your acumen.'

'Yes, yes,' said her father impatiently, 'and then?'

'And will take B, after all.'

The Colonel stood rapt in unpleasant meditation for the space of five seconds.

'God bless my soul!' he cried. 'I see what you mean. Confound it, of course he'll go for Carnmore. Lord, this is a puzzle. I must see Macpherson at once. Are you sure you're right, Nettie?'

'I'm not in the least sure. We've only a choice of uncertainties, and must gamble. But, as far as I see, if we must plump for one, we should plump for Carnmore.'

Colonel Raden departed for his study, after summoning Macpherson to that shrine of the higher thought, and Janet Raden, after one or two brief domestic interviews,

collected her two terriers and set out for her morning walk. The morning was as fresh and bright as April, the rain in the night had set every burn singing, and the thickets and lawns were still damp where the sun had not penetrated. Her morning walk was wont to be a scamper, a thing of hops, skips, and jumps, rather than a sedate progress; but on this occasion, though two dogs and the whole earth invited to hilarity, she walked slowly and thoughtfully. The mossy broken tops of Carnbeg showed above a wood of young firs, and to the right rose the high blue peaks of the Carnmore ground. On which of these on the morrow would John Macnab begin his depredations? He had two days for his exploit; probably he would make his effort on the second day, and devote the first to confusing the minds of the defence. That meant that the problem would have to be thought out new every day, for the alert intelligence of John Macnab — she now pictured him as a sort of Sherlock Holmes in knickerbockers — would not stand still. The prospect exhilarated, but it also alarmed her; the desire to win a new hunter was now a fixed resolution; but she wished she had a colleague. Agatha was no use, and her father, while admirable in tactics, was weak in strategy; she longed more than ever for the help of that frail vessel, Sir Archie.

Her road led her by a brawling torrent, through the famous Glenraden beechwood to the spongy meadows of the haugh, beyond which could be seen the shining tides of the Raden sweeping to the high-backed bridge across which ran the road to Carnmore. The haugh was all bog-myrtle and heather and bracken, sprinkled with great boulders which the river during the ages had brought down from the hills. Half a mile up it stood the

odd tumulus called the Piper's Ring, crowned with an ancient gnarled fir, where reposed, according to the elder Bandicott, the dust of that dark progenitor, Harald Blacktooth. If Mr. Bandicott proposed to excavate there he had his work cut out; the place was encumbered with giant stones, since a thousand floods had washed its sides since it first received the dead Viking. Great birch woods from both sides of the valley descended to the stream, thereby making the excellence of the Home beat, for the woodland stag is a heavier beast than his brother of the high tops.

Close to the road, in a small hollow where one of the rivulets from the woods cut its way through the haugh, she came on an ancient cart resting on its shafts, an ancient horse grazing on a patch of turf among the peat, and a small boy diligently whittling his way through a pile of heather roots. The urchin sprang to his feet and saluted like a soldier.

'Please, lady,' he explained in a high falsetto whine, 'I've gotten permission from Mr. Macpherson to make heather-besoms on this muir. He's aye been awfu' kind to me, lady.'

'You're the boy who sells fish? I've seen you on the road.'

'Aye, lady, I'm Fish Benjie. I sell my fish in the mornin's and the evenin's, and I've a' the day for other jobs. I've aye wanted to come here, for it's the graundest heather i' the countryside; and Mr. Macpherson, he kens I'll dae nae harm, and I've promised no to kindle a fire.'

The child with the beggar's voice looked at her with such sage and solemn eyes that Janet, who had a hopeless weakness for small boys, sat down on a sun-warmed

hillock and stared at him, while he turned resolutely to business.

‘If you’re hungry, Benjie,’ she said, ‘and they won’t let you make a fire, you can come up to the Castle and get tea from Mrs. Fraser. Tell her I sent you.’

‘Thank you, lady, but if *you* please, I was gaun to my tea at Mrs. Macpherson’s. She’s fell fond o’ my haddies, and she tell’t me to tak a look in when I stoppit work. I’m ettlin’ to be here for a guid while.’

‘Will you come every day?’

‘Aye, every day about eight o’clock, and bide till maybé five in the afternoon when I go down to the cobles at Inverlarrig.’

‘Now, look here, Benjie. When you’re sitting quietly working here I want you to keep your eyes open, and if you see any strange man, tell Mr. Macpherson. By strange man I mean somebody who doesn’t belong to the place. We’re rather troubled by poachers just now.’

Benjie raised a ruminant eye from his besoms.

‘Aye, lady. I seen a queer man already this mornin’. He cam up the road and syne started off over the bog. He was sweatin’ sore, and there was twa men from Strathlarrig wi’ him carryin’ picks and shovels. . . . Losh, there he is comin’ back.’

Following Benjie’s pointing finger Janet saw approaching her from the direction of the Piper’s Ring, a solitary figure which laboured heavily among the peat-bogs. Presently it was revealed as an elderly man wearing a broad grey wide-awake and a suit of flannel knickerbockers. His enormous horn spectacles clearly did not help his eyesight, for he had almost fallen over the shafts of the fish-cart before he perceived Janet Raden.

He removed his hat, bowed with an antique courtesy, and asked permission to recover his breath.

'I was on my way to see your father,' he said at length. 'This morning I have prospected the barrow of Harald Blacktooth, and it is clear to me that I can make no progress unless I have Colonel Raden's permission to use explosives. Only the very slightest use, I promise you. I have located, I think, the ceremonial entrance, but it is blocked with boulders which it would take a gang of navvies to raise with crowbars. A discreet application of dynamite would do the work in half an hour. I cannot think that Colonel Raden would object to my using it when I encounter such obstacles. I assure you it will not spoil the look of the barrow.'

'I'm sure Papa will be delighted. You're certain the noise won't frighten the deer? You know the Piper's Ring is in the Forest.'

'Not in the least, my dear young lady. The report will be very slight, scarcely louder than a rifle-shot. I ought to tell you that I am an old hand at explosives, for in my young days I mined in Colorado, and recently I have employed them in my Alaskan researches. . . .'

'If we go home now,' said Janet, rising, 'we'll just catch Papa before he goes out. You're very warm, Mr. Bandicott, and I think you would be the better for a rest and a drink.'

'I certainly should, my dear. I was so eager to begin that I bolted my breakfast, and started off before Junius was ready. He proposes to meet me here.'

Benjie, left alone, wrought diligently at his heather roots, whistling softly to himself, and every now and then raising his head to scan the haugh and the lower glen.

Presently a tall young man appeared, who was identified as the younger American, and who was duly directed to follow his father to the Castle. The two returned in a little while, accompanied by Agatha Raden, and, while the elder Mr. Bandicott hastened to the Piper's Ring, the young people sauntered to the Raden Bridge and appeared to be deep in converse. 'Thae twa's weel agreed,' was Benjie's comment. A little before one o'clock the party adjourned to the Castle, presumably for luncheon, and Benjie, whose noontide meal was always sparing, nibbled a crust of bread and a rind of cheese. In the afternoon Macpherson and one of the gillies strolled past, and the head stalker proved wonderfully gracious, and adjured him, as Janet had done, to keep his eyes open and report the presence of any stranger. 'There'll be the three folk from Strathlarrig howkin' awa' there, but if ye see anybody else, away up to the house and tell the wife. They'll no be here for any good.' Benjie promised fervently, 'I've grand een, Mr. Macpherson, sir, and though they was to be crawlin' like a serpent I'd be on them.' The head stalker observed that he was a 'gleg one,' and went his ways.

Despite his industry Benjie was remarkably observant that day, but he was not looking for poachers. He had suddenly developed an acute interest in the deer. His unaided eyes were as good as the ordinary man's telescope, and he kept a keen watch on the fringes of the great birch woods. The excavation at the Piper's Ring kept away any beasts from the east side of the haugh, but on the west bank of the stream he saw two lots of hinds grazing, with one or two young stags among them, and even on the east bank, close in to the edge of the river, he

saw hinds with calves. He concluded that on the fringes of the Raden the feeding must be extra good, and, as a steady west wind was blowing, the deer there would not be alarmed by Mr. Bandicott's quest. Just after he had finished his bread-and-cheese he was rewarded with the spectacle of a hummel, a great fellow of fully twenty stone, who rolled in a peat-hole and then stood blowing in the shallow water as unconcerned as if he had been on the top of Carnmore. Later in the afternoon he saw a good ten-pointer in the same place, and a little later an eight-pointer with a damaged horn. He concluded that that particular hag was a favourite mud-bath for stags, and that with the wind in the west it was no way interfered with by the activities at the Piper's Ring.

About four o'clock Benjie backed the old horse into the shafts, and jogged up the beech avenue to Mrs. Macpherson's, where he was stayed with tea and scones. There was a gathering outside the door of Macpherson himself and the two gillies, and a strange excitement seemed to have fallen on that stolid community. Benjie could not avoid — indeed, I am not sure that he tried to avoid — hearing scraps of their talk. 'I've been a' round Carnmore,' said Alan, 'and I seen some fine beasts. They're mostly in a howe atween the two tops, and a man at the Grey Beallach could keep an eye on all the good ground.' 'Aye, but there's the Carn Moss, and the burnheads — there will be beasts there too,' said James Macrae. 'There will have to be a man there, for him at the Grey Beallach would not ken what was happening.' 'And what about Corrie Gall?' asked Macpherson fiercely. 'Ye canna post men on Carnmore — they will have to keep moving, it is that awful broken ground.' 'Well, there's you and me

and James,' said Alan, 'and there's Himself.' 'And that's the lot of us and every man wanted,' said Macpherson. 'It's what I was always saying — ye will need every man for Carnmore, and must let Carnbeg alone, or ye can watch Carnbeg and not go near Carnmore. We're far ower few.' 'I wass thinking,' said James Macrae, 'that the youngest leddy might be watching Carnbeg.' 'Aye James' — this satirically from Macpherson — 'and how would the young leddy be keeping a wild man from killing a stag and getting him away?' 'Deed, I don't ken,' said the puzzled James, 'without she took a gun with her and had a shot at him.'

Benjie drove quietly to Inverlarrig for his supply of fish, and did not return to his headquarters in the Wood of Larrigmore till nearly seven o'clock. At eight, having cooked and eaten his supper, he made a simple toilet, which consisted in washing the fish-scales and the stains of peat from his hands, holding his head in the river, parting his damp hair with a broken comb, and putting over his shoulders a waterproof cape, which had dropped from some passing conveyance and had been found by him on the road. Thus accoutred, he crossed the river and by devious paths ascended to Crask.

He ensconced himself in the stable, where he was greeted sourly by the Bluidy Mackenzie, who was tied up in one of the stalls. There he occupied himself in whistling strathspeys and stuffing a foul clay pipe with the stump of a cigar which he had picked up in the yard. Benjie smoked not for pleasure, but from a sense of duty, and a few whiffs were all he could manage with comfort. The gloaming had fallen before he heard his name called, and Wattie Lithgow appeared. 'Ye're there, ye monkey?

The gentlemen are askin' for ye. Quick and follow me. They're in an awfu' ill key the nicht and maunna be keepit waitin'.'

There certainly seemed trouble in the smoking-room when Benjie was ushered in. Lamancha was standing on the hearth-rug with a letter crumpled in his hand, and Sir Archie, waving a missive, was excitedly confronting him. The other two sat in armchairs with an air of protest and dejection.

'I forgot all about the infernal thing till I got Montgomery's letter. The 4th of September! Hang it, my assault on old Claybody is timed to start on the 5th. How on earth can I get to Muirtown and back and deliver a speech, and be ready for the 5th? Besides, it betrays my presence in this part of the world. It simply can't be done . . . and yet I don't know how on earth to get out of it. Apparently the thing was arranged months ago.'

'You're for it all right, my son,' cried Sir Archie, 'and so am I. Here's the beastly announcement. "*A Great Conservative Meeting will be held in the Town Hall, Muirtown, on Thursday, September 4th, to be addressed by the Right Hon. the Earl of Lamancha, M.P., His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Dominions. The chair will be taken at 3 p.m. by His Grace the Duke of Angus, K.G. Among the speakers will be Colonel Wavertree, M.P., the Hon. W. J. Murdoch, ex-Premier of New Caledonia, and Captain Sir Archibald Roylance, D.S.O., prospective Conservative Candidate for Wester Ross.*" Oh, will he? Not by a long chalk! Catch me goin' to such a fiasco, with Charles hidin' here and the show left to the

tender mercies of two rotten bad speakers and a prosy chairman.'

'Did you forget about it too?' Leithen asked.

'Course I did,' said Sir Archie wildly. 'How could I think of anything with you fellows turnin' my house into a den of thieves? I forgot it just as completely as Charles, only it doesn't matter about me, and it matters the devil of a lot about him. I don't stand an earthly chance of winnin' the seat, if first of all I mustn't canvass because of smallpox, and, second, my big meeting, on which all my fellows counted, is wrecked by Charles playin' the fool.'

Lamancha's dark face broke into a smile.

'Don't worry, old chap. I won't let you down. But it looks as if I must let down John Macnab, and just when I was getting keen about him. . . . Hang it, no! There must be a way. I'm not going to be beaten either by Claybody or this damned Tory rally. Ned, you slacker, what's your advice?'

'Have a try at the double event,' Leithen drawled. 'You'll probably make a mess of both, but it's a sporting proposition.'

Archie's face brightened. 'You don't realise how sportin' a proposition it is. The Claybodys will be there, and they'll be all over you — brother nobleman, you know, and you goin' to poach their stags next day! Hang it, why shouldn't you turn the affair into camouflage? "Out of my stony griefs, Bethel I'll raise," says the hymn. . . . We'll have to think the thing out ve-ry carefully. Anyway, Charles, you've got to help me with my speech. I don't mind so much lyin' doggo here if I can put in a bit of good work on the 5th. . . . Now, Benjie, my lad, for your report.'

Benjie, not without a certain shyness, cleared his throat and began. He narrated how, following his instructions, he had secured Macpherson's permission to cut heather for besoms on the Raden haugh. He had duly taken up his post there, had remained till four o'clock, and had seen such and such people and heard this and that talk. He recounted what he could remember of the speeches of Macpherson and the gillies.

'They've got accustomed to the sight of you, I suppose,' Palliser-Yeates said at length.

'Aye, they're accustomed right enough. Both the young lady and Macpherson was tellin' me to keep a lookout for poachers.' Benjie chuckled.

'Then to-morrow you begin to move up to the high ground by the Carnmore peat-road. Still keep busy at your besoms. You understand what I want you for, Benjie? If I kill a stag I have to get it off Glenraden land, and your old fish-cart won't be suspected.'

'Aye, I see that fine. But I've been thinkin' that there's maybe a better way.'

'Go ahead, and let's have it.'

Benjie began his speech nervously, but he soon warmed to it, and borrowed a cigar-box and the fire-irons to explain his case. The interest of his hearers kindled, until all four men were hanging on his words. When he concluded, and had answered sundry questions, Sir Archie drew a deep breath and laughed excitedly.

'I suppose there's nothin' in that, that isn't quite cricket. . . . I thought I knew something about bluff, but this — this absolutely vanquishes the band. Benjie, I'm goin' to have you taught poker. You've the right kind of mind for it.'

CHAPTER V

THE ASSAULT ON GLENRADEN

SHORTLY after midnight of the 28th day of August three men foregathered at the door of Macpherson's cottage, and after a few words took each a different road into the dark wastes of wood and heather. Macpherson contented himself with a patrol of the low ground in the glen, for his legs were not as nimble as they once had been and his back had a rheumatically stiffness. Alan departed with great strides for the Carnbeg tops, and James Fraser, the youngest and the leanest, set out for Carnmore, with the speed of an Indian hunter. . . . Darkness gave place to the translucence of early dawn; the badger trotted home from his wanderings; the hill fox barked in the cairns to summon his household; sleepy pipits awoke; the peregrine who lived above the Grey Beallach drifted down into the glens to look for breakfast; hinds and calves moved up from the hazel shaws to the high fresh pastures; the tiny rustling noises of night disappeared in that hush which precedes the awakening of life; and then came the flood of morning gold from behind the dim eastern mountains, and in an instant the earth had wheeled into a new day. A thin spire of smoke rose from Mrs. Macpherson's chimney, and presently the three wardens of the marches arrived for breakfast. They reported that the forest was still unviolated, that no alien foot had as yet entered its sacred confines. Herd-boys, the offspring of Alan and James Fraser, had taken up their posts at key-points, so that if a human being was

seen on the glaxis of the fort the fact would at once be reported to the garrison.

‘I’m thinkin’ he’ll no come to-day,’ said Macpherson after his third cup of tea. ‘It will be the morn. The day he will be tryin’ to confuse our minds, and that will no be a difficult job wi’ you, Alan, my son.’

‘He’ll come in the da-ark,’ said Alan crossly.

‘And how would he be gettin’ a beast in the dark? The Laird was sayin’ that this man John Macnab was a gra-and sportsman. He will not be shootin’ at any little staggie, but takin’ a sizeable beast, and it’s not a howlet could be tellin’ a calf from a stag in these da-ark nights. Na, he will not shoot in the night, but he might be travelin’ in the night and gettin’ his shot in the early mornin’.’

‘What for,’ Alan asked, ‘should he not be havin’ his shot in the gloamin’ and gettin’ the beast off the ground in the da-ark?’

‘Because we will be watchin’ all hours of the day. Ye heard what the Laird said, Alan Macdonald, and you, James Fraser. This John Macnab is not to shoot a Glenraden beast at all, at all, but if he shoots one he is not to move it one foot. If it comes to fightin’, you are young lads and must break the head of him. But the Laird said for God’s sake you was to have no guns, but to fight like honest folks with your fists, and maybe a wee bit stick. The Laird was sayin’ the law was on our side, except for shootin’. . . . Now, James Fraser, you will take the outer marches the day, and keep an eye on the peat-roads from Inverlarrig, and you, Alan, will watch Carnbeg, and I will be takin’ the woods myself. The Laird was sayin’ that it would be Carnmore the man Macnab would be tryin’, most likely at skreigh of day the morn, and he

would be hidin' the beast, if he got one, in some hag, and waitin' till the da-ark to shift him. So the morn we will all be on Carnmore, and I can tell you the Laird has the ground planned out so that a snipe would not be movin' without us seein' him.'

The early morning broadened into day, and the glen slept in the windless heat of late August. Janet Raden, sauntering down from the Castle towards the river about eleven o'clock, thought that she had never seen the place so sabbatically peaceful. To her unquiet soul the calm seemed unnatural, like a thick cloak covering some feverish activity. All the household were abroad since breakfast — her father on a preliminary reconnaissance of Carnmore, Agatha and Mr. Junius Bandicott on a circuit of Carnbeg, while the gillies and their youthful allies sat perched with telescopes on eyries surveying every approach to the forest. The plans seemed perfect, but the dread of John Macnab, that dark conspirator, would not be exorcised. It was she who had devised the campaign, based on her reading of the enemy's mind; but had she fathomed it, she asked herself? might he not even now be preparing some master-stroke which would crumble their crude defences? Horrible stories which she had read of impersonation and the shifts of desperate characters recurred to her mind. Was John Macnab perhaps old Mr. Bandicott disguised as an archæologist? Or was he one of the Strathlarrig workmen?

She walked over the moor to the Piper's Ring and was greeted by a mild detonation and a shower of earth. Old Mr. Bandicott, very warm and stripped to his shirt, was desperately busy and most voluble about his task. There was no impersonation here, nor in the two fiery-faced

labourers who were burrowing their way towards the resting-place of Harald Blacktooth. Nevertheless, her suspicion was not allayed; she felt herself in the antechamber of plotters, and looked any moment to see on the fringes of the wood or on the white ribbon of road a mysterious furtive figure which she would know for a minion of the enemy.

But the minion did not appear. As Janet stood on the rise before the bridge of Raden with her hat removed to let the faint southwest wind cool her forehead, she looked upon a scene of utter loneliness and peace. The party at the Piper's Ring were hidden, and in all the green amphitheatre nothing stirred but the stream. Even Fish Benjie and his horse had been stricken into carven immobility. He had moved away from the road a few hundred yards into the moor, not far from the waterside, and his little figure, as he whittled at his brooms, appeared from where Janet stood to be as motionless as a boulder, while the old grey pony mused upon three legs as rapt and lifeless as an Elgin marble. The two seemed to have become one with nature, and to be as much part of the sleeping landscape as the clump of birches whose leaves did not even shimmer in that bright silent noontide.

The quiet did something to soothe Janet's restlessness, but after luncheon, which she partook of in solitary state, she found it returning. A kind of *folie de doute* assailed her, not unknown to generals in the bad hours which intervene between the inception and execution of a plan. She had a strong desire to ride up to Crask and have a talk with Sir Archie, and was only restrained by the memory of that young man's last letter, and the hint it contained of grave bodily maladies. She did not know whether to

believe in these maladies or not, but clearly she could not thrust her company upon one who had shown a marked distaste for it. . . . Yet she had her pony saddled and rode slowly in the direction of Strathlarrig, half-hoping to see a limping figure on the highway. But not a soul was in sight on the long blinding stretch or at the bridge where the Crask road started up the hill. Janet turned homeward with a feeling that the world had suddenly become dispeopled. She did not turn her head once, and so failed to notice first one figure and then another, which darted across the highroad, and disappeared in the thick coverts of the Crask hillside.

At the Castle she found Agatha and Junius Bandicott having tea, and presently her father arrived in a state of heat and exhaustion. Stayed with a whiskey-and-soda, Colonel Raden became communicative. He had been over the high tops of Carnmore, had visited the Carn Moss, and Corrie Gall, had penetrated the Grey Beallach, had heard the talés of the gillies and of the herd-boys in their eyries, and his report was 'all clear.' The deer were undisturbed, according to James Fraser, since the morning. Moreover, the peat-road from Inverlarrig had relapsed owing to recent rains into primeval bog, which no wheeled vehicle and few ponies could traverse. The main fortress seemed not only unassailed but unassailable, and Colonel Raden viewed the morrow with equanimity.

The Carnbeg party had a different story to tell, or rather the main members of it had no story at all. Agatha and Junius Bandicott appeared to have sauntered idly into the pleasant wilderness of juniper and heather which lay between the mossy summits, to have lunched at leisure by the famous Cailleach's Well, and to have saun-

tered home again. They reported that it had been divine weather, for a hill breeze had tempered the heat, and that they had observed the Claybodys' yacht far out at the entrance to Loch Larrig. Also Junius had seen his first blue hare, which he called a 'jack rabbit.' Of anything suspicious there had been neither sign nor sound.

But at this moment a maid appeared with the announcement that 'Macpherson was wanting to see the Colonel,' and presently the head stalker arrived in what John Bunyan calls a 'pelting heat.' Generally of a pale complexion which never tanned, he was now as red as a peony, and his grey beard made a startling contrast with his flamboyant face. Usually he was an embarrassed figure inside the Castle, having difficulties in disposing of his arms and legs, but now excitement made him bold.

'I've seen him, Cornel,' he panted. 'Seen him crawlin' like an adder and runnin' like a sta-ag!'

'Seen who? Get your breath, Macpherson.'

'Him — the man — Macnab. I beg your pardon for my pechin', sir, but I came down the hill like I was a rollin' stone. . . . It was up on the back side of Craig Dhu near the old sheep-fauld. I seen a man hunkerin' among the muckle stones, and I got my glass on him, and he was a sma' man that I've never seen afore. I was wild to get a grip of him and I started runnin', to drive him to the Cailleach's Well, where Miss Agatha and the gentleman was havin' their lunch. He seen me, and he took the road I ettled, and I thought I had him, for, thinks I, the young gentleman is soople and lang in the leg. But he seen the danger and turned off down the burn, and I couldna come near him. It would have been all right if I could have made the young gentleman hear, but though

I was roarin' like a stot he was deafer than a tree. Och, it is the great peety.'

'Agatha, what on earth were you doing?' Janet asked severely.

Junius Bandicott blushed hotly. 'I never heard a sound,' he said. 'There must be something funny about the acoustics of that place.'

Colonel Raden, who knew the power of his stalker's lungs, looked in a mystified way from one to the other.

'Didn't you see Macpherson, Agatha?' he asked. 'He must have been in view coming over the shoulder of Craig Dhu.'

It was Agatha's turn to blush, which she did with vigour, and, to Mr. Bandicott's eyes, with remarkable grace.

'Ach, I was in view well enough,' went on the tactless Macpherson, 'and I was routin' like a wild beast. But the twa of them was that busy talking they never lifted their eyes, and the man, as I tell you, slippit off down the burn. It is a gre-at peety, whatever.'

'What did you do then?' the Colonel demanded.

'I followed him till I lost him in that awful rough corrie. . . . But I seen him again — aye, I seen him again, away over on the Maam above the big wud. Standin', as impident as ye please, on the skyline.'

'How long after you lost him in the corrie?' Janet asked.

'Maybe half an hour.'

'Impossible,' she said sharply. 'No living man could cover three miles of that ground in half an hour.'

'I was thinkin' the body was the Deevil.'

'You saw a second man. John Macnab has an accomplice.'

Macpherson scratched his shaggy head. 'I wouldn't say but ye're right, Miss Janet. Now I think of it, it was a bigger man. He didn't bide a moment after I caught sight of him, but I got my glass on him, and he was a bigger man. Aye, a bigger man, and, maybe, a younger man.'

'This is very disturbing,' said Colonel Raden, walking to the window and twisting his moustache. 'What do you make of it, Nettie?'

'I think the affair is proceeding, as generals say about their battles, "according to plan." We didn't know before that John Macnab had a confederate, but of course he was bound to have one. There was nothing against it in the terms of the wager.'

'Of course not, of course not. But what the devil was he doing on Carnbeg? There was no shot, Macpherson?'

'There was no shot, and there will be no shot. There wass no beasts the side they were on, and Alan is up there now with one of James's laddies.'

'It's exactly what we expected,' said Janet. 'It proves that we were right in guessing that John Macnab would take Carnmore. He came here to-day to frighten us about Carnbeg — make us think that he was going to try there, and get us to mass our forces. To-morrow he'll be on Carnmore, and then he'll mean business. I hoped this would happen, and I was getting nervous when Agatha and Mr. Bandicott came home looking as blank as the Babes in the Wood. But I wish I knew which was really John Macnab — the little one or the tall one.'

'What does that matter?' her parent asked.

'Because I should be happier if he were tall. Little men are far more cunning.'

Junius Bandicott, having recovered his composure, chose to be amused. 'I take that as a personal compliment, Miss Janet. I'm pretty big, and I can't say I want to be thought cunning.'

'Then John Macnab will get his salmon,' said Janet with decision.

Junius laughed. 'You may bet he won't. I've gotten the place watched like the Rum Fleet at home. A bird can't hardly cough without its being reported to me. My fellows are on to the game, and John Macnab will have to be a mighty clever citizen to come within a mile of the Strathlarrig water. Nobody is allowed to fish it but myself till the 3d of September is past. I reckon angling just now is the forbidden fruit in this neighbourhood. I've seen but the one fellow fishing in the last three days — on the bit of slack water five hundred yards below the bridge. It belongs to Crask, I think.'

Janet nodded. 'No good except with a worm after a spate. Crask has no fishing worth the name.'

'I saw him from the automobile early this morning,' Junius continued. 'Strange sight he was, too — dressed in pyjamas and rubbers — flogging away at the most hopeless stretch you can imagine — dead calm, not a ripple. He had out about fifty yards of line, and when I passed he made a cast which fell with a flop about his ears. Who do you suppose he was? Somebody from Crask?'

Janet, who was the family's authority on Crask, agreed. 'Probably some English servant who came down before breakfast just to say he had fished for salmon.'

After tea Janet went down into the haugh. She met old Mr. Bandicott returning from the Piper's Ring, a

very grubby old gentleman, and a little dashed in spirits, for he had as yet seen no sign of Harald Blacktooth's coffin. 'Another day's work,' he announced, 'and then I win or lose. I thought I had struck it this afternoon, but it was the solid granite. If the fellow is there, he's probably in a rift of the rock. That has been known to happen. The Vikings found a natural fissure, stuck their dead chief in it, and heaped earth above to make a barrow....'

Down near the stream she met Benjie, who appeared to have worked late at his besoms, bumping over the moor to the road. He and his old pony made a more idyllic picture than ever in the mellow light of evening, almost too conventionally artistic to be real, she thought, till Benjie's immobile figure woke to life at the sight of her and he pulled his lint-white forelock. 'A grand night, lady,' he crooned, and jogged on into the beeches' shade. . . . She sat on the bridge and watched the Raden waters pass from gold to amethyst and from amethyst to purple, and then sauntered back through the sweet-smelling dusk. Visions of John Macnab filled her mind, now a tall bravo with a Colonial accent, now a gnarled Caliban of infinite cunning and gnome-like agility. Where in this haunted land was he ensconced — in some hazel covert, or in some clachan but-and-ben, or miles distant in a populous hotel, ready to speed on a swift car to the scene of action? . . . Anyhow, in twenty-four hours she would know if she had defeated this insolent challenger. On the eve of battle she had forgotten all about the stakes and her new hunter; it was the honour of Glenraden that was concerned, that little stone castle against the world.

Night fell, cool and cloudless, and the gillies went on their patrols. Carnmore was their only beat, and they returned one at a time to snatch a few hours' sleep. At dawn they went out again — with the Colonel, but without Alan, who was to follow after he had had his ration of sleep. It was arranged that the two girls and Junius Bandicott should spend the day on Carnbeg by way of extra precaution, though if a desperate man made the assault there it was not likely that Junius, who knew nothing of deer and had no hillcraft, would be able to stop him.

Janet woke in low spirits, and her depression increased as the morning advanced. She was full of vague forebodings, and of an irritable unrest to which her steady nerves had hitherto been a stranger. She wished she were a man and could be now on Carnmore, for Carnbeg she was convinced was out of danger. Junius, splendid in buckskin breeches, and a russet sweater, she regarded with disfavour; he was a striking figure, but out of keeping with the hills, the obvious amateur, and she longed for the halting and guileful Sir Archie. Nor was her temper improved by the conduct of her companions. Agatha and Junius seemed to have an inordinate amount to say to each other, and their conversation was idiotic to the ears of a third party. Their eyes were far more on each other than on the landscape, and their telescopes were never in use. But it mattered little, for Carnbeg slept in a primordial peace. Only pipits broke the silence, only a circling merlin made movement in a spell-bound world. There were some hinds on the west side of Craig Dhu, but no stag showed — as was natural, the girl reflected, for in this weather and thus early in the season the stags

would be on the highest tops of Carnmore. John Macnab had chosen rightly if he wanted a shot, but there were three gillies and her father to prevent him getting his beast away.

At luncheon, which was eaten by the Cailleach's Well, Junius took to quoting poetry, and Agatha to telling, very charmingly, the fairy tales of the glens. To Janet it all seemed wrong; this was not an occasion for literary philandering, when the credit of Glenraden was at stake. But even she was forced to confess that nothing was astir in the mossy wilderness. She climbed to the top of Craig Dhu and had a long spy, but, except for more hinds and one small knobber, living thing there was none. As the afternoon drew on, she drifted away from the two, and they, being engrossed with each other, did not notice her departure.

She wandered through the deep heather of the Maam to where the great woods began that dipped to the Raden glen. It was pleasant walking in the cool shade of the pines on turf which was half thyme and milkwort and eyebright, and presently her spirits rose. Now and then on some knuckle of heath-covered rock which rose above the trees she would halt, and, stretched at full length, would spy the nooks of the Home beat. There was no lack of deer there. She picked up one group and then another in the aisles and clearings of the woods, and there were shootable stags among them.

A report like a rifle-shot suddenly startled her. Then she remembered old Mr. Bandicott down in the haugh, and, turning her glance in that direction, saw a thin cloud of blue smoke floating away from the Piper's Ring.

Slowly she worked her way downhill, aiming at the

haugh about a mile upstream from the excavators. Once a startled hind and calf sprang up from her feet, and once an old fox slipped out of a pile of rocks and revived thoughts of Warwickshire and her problematical hunter. Soon she was not more than three hundred feet above the stream level, and found a bracken-clad hillock where she could lie and watch the scene. There was a roebuck feeding just below her, a roebuck with fine horns, and it amused her to see the beast come nearer and nearer, since the wind was behind him. He got within five yards of the girl, who lay mute as a stone; then some impulse made him look up and meet her eye, and in a second he had streaked into cover.

Amid that delicious weather and in that home of peace Janet began to recapture her usual mirthfulness. She had been right; Carnmore was the place John Macnab would select, unless his heart had failed him, and on Carnmore he would get a warm reception. There was no need to worry any longer about John Macnab. . . . Her thoughts went back to Agatha. Clearly Junius Bandicott was in love with her, and probably she would soon be in love with Junius Bandicott. No one could call it anything but a most suitable match, but Janet was vaguely unhappy about it, for it meant a break in their tiny household and the end of a long and affectionate, if occasionally tempestuous, comradeship. She would be very lonely at Glenraden without Agatha, and what would Agatha do when transplanted to a foreign shore, Agatha, for whom the world was bounded by her native hills? She began to figure to herself what America was like, and as her pictures had no basis of knowledge they soon became fantastic, and merged into dreams. The drowsy after-

noon world laid its spell upon the girl, and she fell asleep.

She awoke half an hour later with the sound of a shot in her ear. It set her scrambling to her feet till she remembered the excavators at the Piper's Ring, who were out of the sight of the knoll on which she stood, somewhat on her right rear. Reassured, she lazily scanned the sleeping haugh, with the glittering Raden in the middle distance, and beyond the wooded slopes of the other side of the glen. She noticed a small troop of deer splashing through the shallows. Had they been scared by Mr. Bandicott's explosion? That was odd, for the report had been faint and they were up wind from it.

They were badly startled, for they raced through the river and disappeared in a few breathless seconds in the farther woods. . . . Suddenly a thought made her heart beat wildly, and she raked the ground with her glass. . . .

There was something tawny on a patch of turf in a little hollow near the stream. A moment of anxious spying showed her that it was a dead stag. The report had not been Mr. Bandicott's dynamite, but a rifle.

Down the hillside like a startled hind went Janet. She was choking with excitement, and had no clear idea in her head except a determination that John Macnab should not lay hand on the stricken beast. If he had pierced their defences, and got his shot, he would at any rate not get the carcase off the ground. No thought of the stakes and her hunter occurred to her — only of Glenraden and its inviolate honour.

Almost at once she lost sight of the place where the stag lay. She was now on the low ground of the haugh, in a wilderness of bogs and hollows and overgrown boul-

ders, with half a mile of rough country between her and her goal. Soon she was panting hard; presently she had a stitch in her side; her eyes dimmed with fatigue, and her hat flew off and was left behind. It was abominable ground for speed, for there were heather-roots to trip the foot, and mires to engulf it, and noxious stones over which a runner must go warily or break an ankle. On with bursting heart went Janet, slipping, floundering, more than once taking wild tosses. Her light shoes grew leaden, her thin skirts a vast entangling quilt; her side ached and her legs were fast numbing. . . . Then, from a slight rise, she had a glimpse of the Raden water, now very near, and the sight of a moving head. Her speed redoubled, and miraculously her aches ceased — the fire of battle filled her, as it had burned in her progenitors when they descended on their foes through the moonlit passes.

Suddenly she was at the scene of the dark deed. There lay the dead stag, and beside it a tall man with his shirt-sleeves turned up and a knife in his hand. That the miscreant should be calmly proceeding to the gralloch was like a fiery stimulant to Janet's spirit. Gone was every vestige of fatigue, and she descended the last slope like a mænad.

'Stop!' she sobbed. 'Stop, you villain!'

The man started at her voice, and drew himself up. He saw a small dishevelled girl, hatless, her fair locks fast coming down, who, in the attitude of a tragedy queen, stood with uplifted and accusing hand. She saw a tall man, apparently young, with a very ruddy face, a thatch of sandy hair, and ancient disreputable clothes.

'You are beaten, John Macnab,' cried the panting voice. 'I forbid you to touch that stag. I . . .'

The man seemed to have grasped the situation, for he shut the knife and slipped it back in his pocket. Also he smiled. Also he held both hands above his head.

'*Kamerad!*' he said. 'I acknowledge defeat, Miss Raden.'

Then he picked up his rifle and his discarded jacket, and turned and ran for it. She heard him splashing through the river, and in three minutes he was swallowed up in the farther woods.

The victorious Janet sank gasping on the turf. She wanted to cry, but changed her mind and began to laugh hysterically. After that she wanted to sing. She and she alone had defeated the marauder, while every man about the place was roosting idly on Carnmore. Now at last she remembered that hunter who would carry her in the winter over the Midland pastures. That was good, but to have beaten John Macnab was better. . . . And then just a shade of compunction tempered her triumph. She had greatly liked the look of John Macnab. He was a gentleman — his voice bore witness to the fact, and the way he had behaved. *Kamerad!* He must have fought in the war and had no doubt done well there. Also, he was beyond question a sportsman. The stag was just the kind of beast that a sportsman would kill — a switch-horn, going back in condition — and he had picked him out of a herd of better beasts. The shot was a workmanlike one — through the neck. . . . And the audacity of him! His wits had beaten them all, for he had chosen the Home beat which every one had dismissed as inviolable. Truly a foeman worthy of her steel, whom like all good fighters after victory she was disposed to love.

Crouched beside the dead stag, she slowly recovered her breath. What was the next move to be? If she left the beast might not John Macnab return and make off with it? No, he wouldn't. He was a gentleman and would not go back on his admission of defeat. But she was anxious to drain the last drops of her cup of triumph, to confront the idle garrison of Carnmore on its return with the tangible proof of her victory. The stag should be lying at the Castle door, and she herself waiting beside it to tell her tale. She might borrow Mr. Bandicott's men to move it.

Hastily doing up her hair, she climbed out of the hollow to the little ridge which gave a prospect over the haugh. There before her, not a hundred yards distant, were the old cart and the white pony of Fish Benjie, looking as if they had been part of the landscape since the beginning of time.

Benjie had wormed his way far into the moss, for he was more than half a mile from the road. It appeared that he had finished his day's work on the besoms, for his pony was in the shafts, and he himself was busy loading the cart with the fruits of his toil. She called out to him, but got no reply, and it was not till she stood beside him that he looked up from his work.

'Benjie,' she said, 'come at once. I want you to help me. Have you been here long?'

'Since nine this mornin', lady.' Benjie's face was as impassive as a stump of oak.

'Didn't you hear a shot?'

'I heard a gude wheen shots. The auld man up at the Piper's Ring has been blastin' awa'.'

'But close to you? Didn't you see a man — not five minutes ago?'

'Aye. I seen a man. I seen him crossin' the water. I thought he was a gentleman from the Castle. He had a gun wi' him.'

'It was a poacher, Benjie,' said Janet dramatically. 'The poacher I wanted you to look out for. He has killed a stag, too, but I drove him away. You must help me to get the beast home. Can you get your cart over that knowe?'

'Fine, lady.'

Without more words Benjie took the reins and started the old pony. The cart floundered a little in a wet patch, tittuped over the tussocks, and descended with many jolts to the neighbourhood of the stag — Janet dancing in front of it like an Israelitish priest before the Ark of the Covenant.

The late afternoon was very hot, for down in the haugh the wind had died away. The stag weighed not less than fifteen stone, and before they finished Janet would have called them tons. Yet the great task of transshipment was accomplished. The pony was taken out of the shafts, and the cart tilted, and, after some strenuous minutes, the carcase was heaved and pushed and levered on to its floor. Janet, hanging on to the shafts, with incredible exertions pulled them down, while Benjie — a tiny Atlas — prevented the beast slipping back by bearing its weight on his shoulders. The back-board was put in its place, the mass of brooms and heather piled on the stag, the pony restored to the shafts, and the cortège was ready for the road. Benjie had his face adorned with a new scratch and a quantity of deer's blood, Janet had nobly torn her jumper and one stocking, but these were trivial casualties for so great an action.

‘Drive straight to the Castle and tell them to leave the beast before the door. You understand, Benjie? Before the door — not in the larder. I’m going to cut home through the woods, for I’m an awful sight.’

‘Ye look very bonny, lady,’ said the gallant Benjie as he took up the reins.

Janet watched the strange outfit lumber from the hollow and nearly upset over a hidden boulder. It had the appearance of a moving peat-stack, with a solitary horn jutting heavenwards like a withered branch. Once again the girl subsided on the heather and laughed till she ached.

The highway by the Larrig side slept in the golden afternoon. Not a conveyance had disturbed its peace save the baker’s cart from Inverlarrig, which had passed about three o’clock. About half-past five a man crossed it, a man who had descended from the hill and who had used the stepping-stones where Sir Archibald Roylance had come to grief. He was a tall man with a rifle, hatless, untidy, and very warm, and he seemed to desire to be unobserved, for he made certain that the road was clear before he ventured on it. Once across, he found shelter in a clump of broom, whence he could command a long stretch of the highway, almost from Glenraden gates to the Bridge of Larrig.

Mr. Palliser-Yeates, having reached sanctuary — for behind him now lay the broken hillsides of Crask — mopped his brow and lit a pipe. He did not seem to be greatly distressed at the result of the afternoon. Indeed he laughed — not wildly like Janet, but quietly and with philosophy. ‘A very neat hold-up,’ he reflected. ‘Gad, she came on like a small destroying-angel. . . . That’s the

girl Archie's been talking about . . . a very good girl. She looked as if she'd have taken on an army corps. . . . I suppose that was the right way for the thing to end. . . . Jolly romantic ending — might have come out of a novel. Only it should have been Archie, and a prospect of wedding bells — what? . . . Anyhow, we'd have won out all right but for the girl, and I don't mind being beaten by her. . . .'

His meditations were interrupted by the sound of furious wheels on the lone highway, and he cautiously raised his head to see an old horse and an older cart being urged towards him at a canter. The charioteer was a small boy, and above the cart sides projected a stag's horn.

Forgetting all precautions, he stood up, and at the sight of him Benjie, not without difficulty, checked the ardour of his much-belaboured beast, and stopped before him.

'I've gotten it,' he whispered hoarsely. 'The stag's in the cairt. The lassie and me histed him in, and she tell't me to drive to the Castle. But when I was out o' sicht o' her, I took the auld road through the wud and here I am. We've gotten the stag off Glenraden ground and we can hide him up at Crask, and I'll slip down i' the cairt afore mornin' and leave him oot bye the Castle wi' a letter from John Macnab. Fegs, it was a near thing!'

Benjie's voice rose into a shrill pæan, his disreputable face shone with unholy joy. And then something in Palliser-Yeates's eyes cut short his triumph.

'Benjie, you little fool, right-about turn at once. I'm much obliged to you, but it can't be done. It isn't the game, you know. I chucked up the sponge when Miss

Raden challenged me, and I can't go back on that. Back you go to Glenraden and hand over the stag. Quick, before you're missed. . . . And look here — you're a first-class sportsman, and I'm enormously grateful to you. Here is something for your trouble.'

Benjie's face grew very red as he swung his equipage round. 'I see,' he said. 'If ye like to be beat by a lassie, dinna blaine me. I'm no wantin' your money.'

The next moment the fish-cart was clattering in the other direction.

To a mystified and anxious girl, pacing the gravel in front of the Castle, entered the fish-cart. The old horse seemed in the last stages of exhaustion, and the boy who drove it was a dejected and sparrow-like figure.

'Where in the world have you been?' Janet demanded.

'I was run awa' wi', lady,' Benjie whined. 'The auld powny didna like the smell o' the stag. He bolted in the wud, and I didna get him stoppit till vera near the Larrig Brig.'

'Poor little Benjie! Now you're going to Mrs. Fraser to have the best tea you ever had in your life, and you shall also have ten shillings.'

'Thank you kindly, lady, but I canna stop for tea. I maun awa' down to Inverlarrig for my fish.' But his hand closed readily on the note, for he had no compunction in taking money from one who had made him to bear the bitterness of incomprehensible defeat.

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN OF HARALD BLACKTOOTH

MISS JANET RADEN had a taste for the dramatic, which that night was nobly gratified. The space in front of the great door of the Castle became a stage of which the sole furniture was a deceased stag, but on which event succeeded event with a speed which recalled the cinema rather than the legitimate drama.

First, about six o'clock, entered Agatha and Junius Bandicott from their casual wardenship of Carnbeg. The effect upon the young man was surprising. Hitherto he had only half believed in John Macnab, and had regarded the defence of Glenraden as more or less of a joke. It seemed to him inconceivable that, even with the slender staffing of the forest, one man could enter and slay and recover a deer. But when he heard Janet's tale, he became visibly excited, his careful and precise English, the bequest of his New England birth, broke down into college slang!

'The man's a crackajack,' he murmured reverentially. 'He has us all rocketing around the mountain-tops, and then takes advantage of my dad's blasting operations and raids the front yard. He can pull the slick stuff all right, and we at Strathlarrig had better get cold towels round our heads and do some thinking. Our time's getting short, too, for he starts at midnight the day after to-morrow. . . . What did you say the fellow was like, Miss Janet? Young, and big, and behaved like a gentleman? It's a tougher proposition than I thought, and I'm going home right now to put old Angus through his paces.'

With a deeply preoccupied face, Junius, declining tea, fetched his car from the stable-yard and took his leave.

At seven-fifteen Colonel Raden, bestriding a deer pony, emerged from the beech avenue, and waved a cheerful hand to his daughters.

'It's all right, my dears. Not a sign of the blackguard. The men will remain on Carnmore till midnight, to be perfectly safe, but I'm inclined to think that the whole thing is a fiasco. He has been frightened away by our precautions. But it's been a jolly day on the high tops, and I have the thirst of all creation.'

Then his eye fell on the stag. 'God bless my soul,' he cried, 'what is that?'

'That,' said Janet, 'is the stag which John Macnab killed this afternoon.'

The Colonel promptly fell off his pony.

'Where — where?' he stammered.

'On the Home beat,' said Janet calmly. The situation was going to be quite as dramatic as she had hoped. 'I saw it fall, and ran hard and got up to it just when he was starting the gralloch. He was really quite nice about it.'

'What did he do?' her parent demanded.

'He held up his hands and laughed and cried, "*Kam-erad!*" Then he ran away.'

'The scoundrel showed a proper sense of shame.'

'I don't think he was ashamed. Why should he be, for we accepted his challenge. You know he's a gentleman, Papa, and quite young and good-looking.'

Colonel Raden's mind was passing through swift stages from exasperation to unwilling respect. It was an infernal annoyance that John Macnab should have been suffered to intrude on the sacred soil of Glenraden, but

the man had played the boldest kind of hand, and he had certainly not tailored his beast. Besides, he had been beaten — beaten by a girl, a daughter of the house. The honour of Glenraden might be considered sacrosanct, after all.

A long drink restored the Colonel's equanimity, and the thought of their careful preparations expended in the void moved him to laughter.

'Pon my word, Nettie, I should like to ask the fellow to dinner. I wonder where on earth he is living. He can't be far off, for he is due at Strathlarrig very soon. When did young Bandicott say the day was?'

'Midnight, the day after to-morrow. Mr. Junius feels very solemn after to-day, and has hurried home to put his house in order.'

'Nettie,' said the Colonel gravely, 'I am prepared to make a modest bet that John Macnab gets his salmon. Hang it all, if he could outwit us — and he did it, confound him — he is bound to outwit the Bandicotts. I tell you what, John Macnab is a very remarkable man — a man in a million, and I'm very much inclined to wish him success.'

'So am I,' said Janet; but Agatha announced indignantly that she had never met a case of grosser selfishness. She announced, too, that she was prepared to join in the guarding of Strathlarrig.

'If you and Junius are no more use than you were on Carnbeg to-day, John Macnab needn't worry,' said Janet sweetly.

Agatha was about to retort when there was a sudden diversion. The elder Bandicott appeared at a pace which was almost a run, breathing hard, and with all the appear-

ance of strong excitement. Fifty yards behind him could be seen the two Strathlarrig labourers, making the best speed they could under the burden of heavy sacks. Mr. Bandicott had no breath left to speak, but he motioned to his audience to give him time and permit his henchmen to arrive. These henchmen he directed to the lawn, where they dropped their sacks on the grass. Then, with an air which was almost sacramental, he turned to Colonel Raden.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘you are privileged — *we* are privileged — to assist in the greatest triumph of modern archæology. I have found the coffin of Harald Blacktooth with the dust of Harald Blacktooth inside it.’

‘The devil you have!’ said the Colonel. ‘I suppose I ought to congratulate you, but I’m bound to say I’m rather sorry. I feel as if I had violated the tomb of my ancestors.’

‘You need have no fear, sir. The dust has been reverently restored to its casket, and to-morrow the Piper’s Ring will show no trace of the work. But within the stone casket there were articles which, in the name of science, I have taken the liberty to bring with me, and which will awake an interest among the learned, not less, I am convinced, than Schliemann’s discoveries at Mycenæ. I have found, sir, incredible treasures.’

‘Treasures!’ cried all three of his auditors, for the word has not lost its ancient magic.

Mr. Bandicott, with the air of one addressing the Smithsonian Institution, signalled to his henchmen, who thereupon emptied the sacks on the lawn. A curious jumble of objects lay scattered under the evening sun — two massive torques, several bowls and flagons, spear-

heads from which the hafts had long since rotted, a sword-blade, and a quantity of brooches, armlets, and rings. A dingy enough collection they made to the eyes of the on-lookers as Mr. Bandicott arranged them in two heaps.

‘These,’ he said, pointing to the torques, armlets, and flagons, ‘are, so far as I can judge, of solid gold.’

The Colonel called upon his Maker to sanctify his soul. ‘Gold! Those great things! They must be prodigiously valuable. Are they mine, or yours, or whose?’

‘I am not familiar with the law of Scotland on the matter of treasure-trove, but I assume that the State can annex them, paying you a percentage of their value. For myself, I gladly waive all claims. I am a man of science, sir, not a treasure-hunter. . . . But the merit of the discovery does not lie in those objects, which can be paralleled from many tombs in Scotland and Norway. No, sir, the tremendous, the epoch-making value is to be found in these.’ And he indicated some bracelets and a necklace which looked as if they were made of queerly marked and very dirty shells.

Mr. Bandicott lifted one and fingered it lovingly.

‘I have found such objects in graves as far apart as the coast of Labrador and the coast of Rhode Island, and as far inland as the Ohio Basin. These shells were the common funerary adjunct of the primitive inhabitants of my country, and they are peculiar to the North American continent. Do you see what follows, sir?’

The Colonel did not, and Mr. Bandicott, his voice thrilling with emotion, continued:

‘It follows that Harald Blacktooth obtained them from the only place he could obtain them, the other side of the Atlantic. There is historical warrant for believing that

he voyaged to Greenland; and now we know that he landed upon the main North American continent. The legends of Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky are verified by archæology. In you, sir, I salute, most reverently salute, the representative of a family to whom belongs the credit hitherto given to Columbus.'

Colonel Raden plucked feebly at his moustache, and Janet, I regret to say, laughed. But her untimely merriment was checked by Mr. Bandicott, who was pronouncing a sort of benediction.

'I rejoice that it has been given to me, an American, to solve this secular riddle. When I think that the dust, which an hour ago I touched, and which has lain for centuries under that quiet mound, was once the man who, first of Europeans, trod our soil, my imagination staggers. Colonel Raden, I thank you for having given me the greatest moment of my not uneventful life.'

He took off his hat, and the Colonel rather shamefacedly removed his. The two men stood looking solemnly at each other till practical considerations occurred to the descendant of the Viking.

'What are you going to do with the loot?' he asked.

'With your permission, I will take it to Strathlarrig, where I can examine and catalogue it at my leisure. I propose to announce the find at once to the world. Tomorrow I will return with my men and remove the traces of our excavation.'

Mr. Bandicott departed in his car, sitting erect at the wheel in a strangely priest-like attitude, while the two men guarded the treasure behind. He had no eyes for the twilight landscape, or he would have seen in the canal-like stretch of the Larrig belonging to Crask, which lay below

the rapids and was universally condemned as hopeless for fish, a solitary angler, who, as the car passed, made a most bungling amateurish cast, but who, when the coast was once more clear, flung a line of surprising delicacy. He could not see the curious way in which that angler placed his fly, laying it with a curl a yard above a moving fish, floating it dry till after it had passed the fish, and then sinking it with a dexterous twist, nor did he see, a quarter of an hour later, the same angler land a fair salmon from water in which in the memory of man no salmon had ever been taken before.

Colonel Raden and his daughters stood watching the departing archæologist, and as his car vanished among the beeches Janet seized her sister and whirled her into a dance. 'Such a day,' she cried, when the indignant Agatha had escaped and was patting her disordered hair. 'Losses — one stag, which was better dead. Gains — defeat of John Macnab, fifty pounds sterling, a share of unknown value in Harald Blacktooth's treasure, and the annexation of America by the Raden family.'

'You'd better say that America has annexed us,' said the still flustered Agatha. 'They've dug up our barrow, and this afternoon Junius Bandicott asked me to marry him.'

Janet stopped in her tracks. 'What did you say?'

'I said "No," of course. I've only known him a week.' But her tone was such as to make her sister fear the worst.

Mr. Bandicott was an archæologist, but he was also a business man, and he was disposed to use the whole apparatus of civilisation to announce his discovery to the world. With a good deal of trouble he got the two chief Scot-

tish newspapers on the telephone, and dictated to them a summary of his story. He asked them to pass the matter on to the London press, and he gave them ample references to establish his good faith. Also he prepared a sheaf of telegrams and cables — to learned societies in Britain and America, to the great New York daily of which he was the principal owner, to the British Museum, to the Secretary for Scotland, and to friends in the same line of scholarship. Having left instructions that these messages should be despatched from Inverlarrig at dawn, he went to bed in a state of profound jubilation and utter fatigue.

Next morning, while his father was absorbed in the remains of Harald Blacktooth, Junius summoned a council of war. To it there came Angus, the head keeper, a morose old man nearly six-foot-four in height, clean-shaven, with eyebrows like a pent-house; Lennox, his second-in-command, whom Leithen had met on his reconnaissance; and two youthful watchers, late of Lovat's Scouts, known as Jimsie and Davie. There were others about the place who could be mobilised if necessary, including the two chauffeurs, an under-footman and a valet, but, as Junius looked at his formidable quartet, and reflected on the narrow limits of the area of danger, he concluded that he had all the man-power he needed.

'Now, listen to me, Angus,' he began. 'This poacher Macnab proposes to start in to-morrow night at twelve o'clock, and according to his challenge he has forty-eight hours to get a fish in — up till midnight on the 3d of September. I want your advice about the best way of check-mating him. You've attended to my orders and let nobody near the river during the past week?'

'Aye, sir, and there's nobody socht to gang near it,'

said Angus. 'The countryside has been as quiet as a grave.'

'Well, it won't be after to-morrow night. You've probably heard that this Macnab killed a stag on Glenraden yesterday—killed it within half a mile of the house, and would have got away with it but for the younger Miss Raden.'

They had heard of it, for the glen had talked of nothing else all night, but they thought it good manners to express amazement.

'Heard ye ever the like?' said one. 'Macnab maun be a fair deevil,' said another. 'If I had just a grip of him!' sighed the blood-thirsty Angus.

'It's clear we're up against something quite out of the common,' Junius went on, 'and we daren't give him the faintest outside chance. Now, let's consider the river. You say you've seen nobody near it.'

'There hasn't been a line cast in the watter forbye your own, sir,' said Angus.

'I just seen the one man fishin' a' week,' volunteered Jimsie. 'It was on the Crask water below the brig. I jaloused that he was one of the servants from Crask, and maybe no very right in the heid. He had no notion of it at all, at all.'

'Well, that's so far good. Now, what about the river outside the park? Our beat runs from the Larrig Bridge—what's it like between the bridge and the lodge? You've never taken me fishing there.'

'Ye wad need to be dementit before you went fishin' there,' said Angus grimly. 'There's the stretch above the brig that they ca' the Lang Whang. There was never a man killed a saumon in it, for the fish dinna bide, but rin

through to the Wood Pule. There's fish in the Wood Pule, but the trees are that thick that ye canna cast a flee. Though I'll no say,'—he added meditatively—'that ye couldna cleek a fish out of it. I'd better put a watcher at the Wood Pule.'

'You may rule that out, for the bargain says, "legitimate means," and from all I know of Macnab he's a sportsman and keeps his word. Well, then, we come to the park, where we've the five pools—The Duke's, the Black Scour, Davie's Pot, Lady Maisie's, and The Minister's. We've got to keep our eyes skinned there. . . . What about the upper water?'

'There's no a fish in it,' said Lennox. 'They canna get past the linn above The Minister's. There was aye talk o' makin' a salmon ladder, but naething was done, and there's nocht above The Minister's, but small broun trout.'

'That makes it a pretty simple proposition,' said Junius. 'We've just the five pools to guard. For the form of the thing we'll keep watchers on all night, but we may take it that the danger lies only in the thirty-four hours of daylight. Now, remember, we're taking no chances. Not a soul is to be allowed to fish on the Strath-larrig water till after midnight on the 3d of September. Not even I or my father. Macnab's a foxy fellow and I wouldn't put it past him to disguise himself as Mr. Bandicott or myself. Do you understand? If you see a man near the river, kick him out. If he has a rod in his hand, lock him up in the garage and send for me. . . . No, better still. Nobody's to be allowed inside the gates—except Colonel Raden and his daughters. You'd better tell the lodge-keeper, Angus. If anybody comes to call, they

must come back another day. These are my orders, you understand, and I fire any one who disobeys them. If the 3d of September passes without accident there's twenty dollars — I mean to say, five pounds — for each of you. That's all I've got to say.'

'Will we watch below the park, sir?' Angus asked.

'Watch every damned foot of the water from the Bridge to the linns.'

Thus it came about that when Janet Raden took her afternoon ride past the Wood of Larrigmore she beheld a man patrolling the bog like a policeman on point duty, and when she entered the park for a gallop on the smooth turf she observed a picket at each pool. 'Poor John Macnab!' she sighed. 'He hasn't an earthly chance, I'm rather sorry my family ever discovered America.'

Next day, the 1st of September, the Scottish press published a short account of Mr. Bandicott's discovery, and the 'Scotsman' had a leader on it. About noon a spate of telegrams began, and the girl who carried them on a bicycle from Inverlarrig had a weary time of it. The following morning the press of Britain spread themselves on the subject. The 'Times' had a leader and an interview with a high authority at the British Museum; the 'Daily Mail' had a portrait of Mr. Bandicott and a sketch of his past career, a photograph of what purported to be a Viking's tomb in Norway, and a chatty article on the law of treasure trove. The 'Morning Post' congratulated the discoverers in the name of science, but lamented in the name of patriotism that the honour should have fallen to an alien — views which led to an interminable controversy in its pages with the secretary of the Pilgrims' Club

and the president of the American Chamber of Commerce. The evening papers had brightly written articles on Strathlarrig, touching on the sport of deerstalking, Celtic mysticism, the crofter question, and the law dealing with access to mountains. The previous evening, too, the special correspondents had begun to arrive from all points of the compass, so that the little inn of Inverlarrig had people sleeping in its one bathroom and under its dining-room table. By the morning of the 2d of September the glen had almost doubled its male population.

The morning, after some rain in the night, broke in the thin fog which promised a day of blazing heat. Sir Edward Leithen, taking the air after breakfast, decided that his attempt should be made in the evening, for he wanted the Larrig waters well warmed by the sun for the type of fishing he proposed to follow. Benjie had faithfully reported to him the precautions which the Bandicotts had adopted, and his meditations were not cheerful. With luck he might get a fish, but only by a miracle could he escape unobserved. His plan depended upon the Lang Whang being neglected by the watchers as not worthy of their vigilance, but according to Benjie's account even the Lang Whang had become a promenade. He had now lost any half-heartedness in the business, and his obstinate soul was as set on victory as ever it had been in a case in the law courts. For the past four days he had thought of nothing else, his interest in Palliser-Yeates's attack on Glenraden had been notably fainter than that of the others, every energy he had of mind and body was centred upon killing a fish that night and carrying it off. With some amusement he reflected that he had dissipated the last atom of his *ennui*, and he almost regretted that

apathy had been exchanged for this violent preoccupation.

Presently he turned his steps to the harbour to the east of the garden, which formed at once a hiding-place and a watch-tower. There he found his host busy with the preparation of his speech with the assistance of Lamancha, who was also engaged intermittently in the study of the Ordnance map of Haripol.

'It's a black lookout for you, Ned,' said Sir Archie. 'I hear the Bandicotts have taped off every yard of their water, and have got a man to every three. Benjie says the place only wants a piper or two to be like the Muirtown Highland Gathering. What are you going to do about it?'

'I'm going to have a try this evening. I can't chuck in my hand, but the thing's a stark impossibility. I hoped old Bandicott would be so excited at unearthing the Viking that he would forget about precautions, but he's as active as a beaver.'

'That's the young 'un. He don't give a damn for Vikings, but he's out to protect his fish. You've struck the American business mind, my lad, and it's an awful thing for us casual Britons. I suppose you won't let me come down and watch you. I'd give a lot to see a scrap between you and that troglodyte Angus.'

At that moment Benjie, wearing the waterproof cape of ceremony, presented himself at the harbour door. He bore a letter which he presented to Sir Archie. The young man read it with a face which was at once perplexed and pleased.

'It's from old Bandicott. He says he has got some antiquarian swell — Professor Babwater, I think the name

is — coming to stay, and he wants me to dine to-night — says the Radens are coming too. . . . This is the devil. What had I better do, Charles?’

‘Stay at home. You’ll put your foot in it somehow if you go. The girl who held up old John will be there, and she’s bound to talk about John Macnab, and you’re equally bound to give the show away.’

‘But I haven’t any sort of excuse. Americans are noted for their politeness, and here have I been shutting the door in the face of the poor old chap when he toiled up the hill. He won’t understand it, and the people will begin to talk, and that’s the quickest way to blow the gaff. Besides, I’ve got to give up this lie about my ill-health if I’m to appear at Muirtown the day after to-morrow. What do *you* say, Ned?’

‘I think you’d better go,’ Leithen answered. ‘We can’t have the neighbourhood thinking you are plague-stricken. You’ll be drinking port, while I’m being carted by the gillies into the coal-hole. But, for Heaven’s sake, Archie, go canny. That Raden girl will turn you inside out, if you give her a chance. And don’t you try and be clever, whatever happens. If there’s a row and you see me being frog-marched into captivity, don’t trouble to create a diversion. Behave as if you had never seen me in your life before. . . . You hadn’t heard of John Macnab except from Miss Raden, and you’re desperately keen to hear more, you understand. Play the guileless innocent and rack your brains to think who he can be. Start any hare you like — that he’s D’Annunzio looking for excitement . . . or the Poet Laureate . . . or an escaped lunatic. And keep it up that you are in delicate health. Oh, and talk politics — they’re safe enough. Babble about the rally,

and how the great Lamancha's coming up for it all the way from the Borders.'

Archie nodded, with a contented look in his eyes. 'I'm goin' to take your advice. Where did you get this note, Benjie? From Mactavish at the lodge? All right, I'll give you a line to take back with you. . . . By the way, Ned, what's your get-up to-night? I'd better know beforehand in case of accidents.'

'I'm going to look the basest kind of poaching tramp. I've selected my costume from the combined wardrobes of this household, and I can tell you it's pretty dingy. Mrs. Lithgow is at present engaged in clouting the oldest pair of Wattie's breeks for me. . . . My only chance is to be a regular ragamuffin, and the worst I need fear then is a rough handling from the gillies. Bandicott, I take it, is not the sort of fellow to want to prosecute. If I'm caught — which is fairly certain — I'll probably get a drubbing and spend the night in the cellar and be given my breakfast next morning and kicked out. It's a different matter for you, Charles, with the legally minded Claybody.'

'What odds are you offerin'?' Sir Archie asked. 'John backed himself and I took a tenner off him. What about an even fiver?'

'I'll give you three to one in five-pound notes that I win,' said Leithen grimly. 'But that's pride, not conviction.'

'Done with you, my lad,' said Sir Archie, and departed to write an acceptance of the invitation to dinner.

Fish Benjie remained behind, and it was clear that he had something to communicate. He caught Lamancha's eye, who gave him the opening he sought by asking what was the news from Strathlarrig. Benjie had the instinct

of the ballad-maker, and would begin his longer discourses with an epic flourish of the 'Late at e'en drinkin' the wine' style.

'It was at fower o'clock this mornin' they started,' he announced, 'and they're still comin'.'

'Coming? Who?' Leithen asked.

'Journalists. The place is crawlin' wi' them. I seen six on bicycles and five in cawrs and twa in the Inverlarrig dowg-cairt. They're a' wantin' to see auld Bandicott, but auld Bandicott will no see them. Mactavish stops them at the lodge, and speirs what they want, and they gie him cairds wi' their names prentit, and he sends them up to the hoose, but he'll no let them enter. Syne the message comes back that the maister will see them the day after the morn, but till then naebody maun put a fit inside the gates.'

'What happened then?' Leithen asked with acute interest.

'It hasna happened — it's still happenin'! I never in my life heard sic a lot o' sweer words. Says ane, "Does the auld dotterel think he can defy the British Press? We'll mak his life no worth leevin'." Says another, "I've come a' the gait frae London and I'll no budge till I've seen the banes o' that Viking!" One or twa went back to Inverlarrig, but the feck o' them just scattered like paitricks. They clamb the wall, and they waded up the water, and they got in by the top o' the linns. In half an hour there was half a dizzen o' them inside the Strathlarrig policies. Man'—here he fixed his glowing eye on Leithen — 'if ye had been on the Lang Whang this mornin' ye could have killed a fish and naebody the wiser.'

'Good Lord! Are they there still?'

'Na. They were huntit oot. Every man about the place was huntin' them, and Angus was roarin' like a bull. The young laird thocht they were Bolshies and cam doun wi' a gun. Syne the auld man appeared and spoke them fair and telled them he was terrible sorry, but he couldna see them for twa days, and if they contentit themselves that lang he would hae them a' to their denner and show them everything. After that they gaed awa', but there's aye mair arrivin' and I'm expectin' mair riots. They're forritsome lads, thae journalists, and a dour crop to shift. But they're kind folk, and gie'd me a shillin' a-piece for advisin' them.'

'What did you advise?'

'I advised them to gang doun to Glenraden,' said Benjie, with an elfin smile. 'I said they should gang and howk in the Piper's Ring and they would maybe find mair treasure. Twa-three o' them got spades and picks and startit off. I'm thinkin' Macpherson will be after them wi' a whup.'

Leithen's brows were puckered in thought. 'It looks as if my bet with Archie wasn't so crazy after all. This invasion is bound to confuse Bandicott's plans. And you say it's still going on? The gillies will be weary men before night.'

'They will that,' Benjie assented. 'And there's no a man o' them can rin worth a docken, except Jimsie. Thae journalists was far soopler.'

'More power to the Press. Benjie, back you go and keep an eye on Strathlarrig, and stir up the journalists to a sense of their rights. Report here this afternoon at four, for we should be on the move by six, and I've a lot to say to you.'

In the course of the morning Leithen went for a walk among the scaurs and dingles of Crask hill. He followed a footpath which took him down the channel of a tiny burn and led to a little mantelpiece of a meadow from which Wattie Lithgow drew a modest supply of bog-hay. His mind was so filled with his coming adventure that he walked with his head bent, and at a turn of the path nearly collided with a man.

Murmuring a gruff 'Fine day,' he would have passed on, when he became aware that the stranger had halted. Then, to his consternation, he heard his name uttered, and had perforce to turn. He saw a young man in knickerbockers and heavy nailed boots who smiled diffidently as if uncertain whether he would be recognised.

'Sir Edward Leithen, isn't it?' he said. 'I once had the pleasure of meeting you, sir, when you lunched with the Lobby journalists. I was then on the Lobby staff of the "Monitor." My name is Crossby.'

'Of course, of course. I remember perfectly. Let's sit down, Mr. Crossby, unless you're in a hurry. Where are you bound for?'

'Simply stretching my legs. I was climbing rocks at Sligachan when my paper wired me to come on here. The Press seems to have gone mad about this Viking's tomb — think they've got hold of a second Tutankhamen. So I got a fisherman to take me and my bicycle over to the mainland and pedalled the rest of the road. I thought I had a graft with old Bandicott, for I used to write for his paper — the "New York Bulletin," you know — but it appears there's nothing doing. Odd business, for you don't often find Americans shy of the Press. But I think I've found out the reason, and that makes a good enough story in itself. Perhaps you've heard it?'

‘No,’ said Leithen, ‘but I’d like to, if you don’t mind. I’m not a journalist, so I won’t give you away. Let’s have it.’

He stole a glance at his companion, and saw a pleasant, shrewd, boyish face, with the hard sunburnt skin of one in the prime of physical condition. Like many others of his type, Leithen liked journalists as much as he disliked men of letters — the former had had their corners smoothed by a rough life, and lacked the vanity and spiritual pride of the latter. Also he had acquired from experience a profound belief in the honour of the profession, for at various times in his public career he had put his reputation into their hands, and they had not failed him. It was his maxim that if you tried to bamboozle them they were out for your blood, but that if you trusted them they would see you through.

‘Let’s hear it, Mr. Crossby,’ he repeated. ‘I’m deeply interested.’

‘Well, it’s a preposterous tale, but the natives seem to believe it. They say that some fellow, who calls himself John Macnab, has dared the magnates in these parts to prevent his killing a stag or a salmon in their preserves. He has laid down pretty stiff conditions for himself, for he has to get his beast off their ground and hand it back to them. They say he has undertaken to pay five hundred pounds to any charity the owner names if he succeeds, and one thousand pounds if he fails — so he must have money to burn, and it appears that he has already paid the five hundred pounds. He started on Glenraden, and the old Highland chief there had every man and boy for three days watching the forest. Then on the third day, when everybody was on the mountain-tops, in sails John

Macnab and kills a stag under the house windows. He reckoned on the American's dynamite charges in his search for the Viking to hide his shot. And he would have got away with it, too, if one of the young ladies hadn't appeared on the scene and cried "Desist!" So what does this bandit do but off with his hat, makes his best bow, and says, "Madame, your servant," and vanishes, leaving the Chief richer by a thousand pounds. It's Bandicott's turn to-day and to-morrow, and the Strathlarrig household is squatting along the river-banks, and the hard-working correspondent is chivvied away till the danger is past. I'm for Macnab myself. It warms my heart to think that there's such a sportsman left alive. It's pure Robin Hood.'

Leithen laughed. 'I back him, too. Are you going to publish that story?'

'Yes, why not? I've written most of it and it goes by the afternoon post.' Mr. Crossby pulled out a notebook and fluttered the leaves.

'I call it "The Return of Harald Blacktooth." Rather neat, I think. The idea is that when they started to dig up the old fellow his spirit reincarnated itself in John Macnab. I hope to have a second instalment, for something's bound to happen at Strathlarrig to-day or to-morrow. Are you holidaying here, Sir Edward? Crask's the name of this place, isn't it? They told me that that mad fellow Roylance owned it.'

Leithen nodded. He was bracing himself for another decision of the same kind as he had taken when he met Fish Benjie. Providence seemed to be forcing him to preserve his *incognito* only by sharing the secret.

'But, of course,' Mr. Crossby went on, 'my main busi-

ness here is the Viking and I'm keen to find some way to get over Bandicott's reticence. I don't want to wait till the day after to-morrow and then come in with the ruck. I wonder . . . would it be too much to ask you to give me a leg up? I expect you know the Bandicotts?'

'Curiously enough, I don't. I am not sure how far I can help you, Mr. Crosby, but I rather think you can help me. Are you, by any happy chance, a long-distance runner?'

The journalist opened his eyes. 'Well, I used to be. South London Harriers, you know. And I'm in fairly good condition at present after ten days on the Coolin rocks.'

'Well, if I can't give you a story, I think I can put you in the way of an adventure. Will you come up to Crask to luncheon and we'll talk it over?'

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD ETONIAN TRAMP

SIR ARCHIE got himself into the somewhat ancient dress-coat which was the best he had at Crask, and about half-past seven started his Hispana (a car in which his friends would not venture with Archie as driver) down the long hill to the gates of Strathlarrig. He was aware that somewhere in the haugh above the bridge was Leithen, but the only figure visible was that of Jimsie, the Strathlarrig gillie, who was moodily prowling about the upper end. As he passed the Wood of Larrigmore, Benjie's old pony was grazing at tether, and the old cart rested on its shafts; the embers of a fire still glowed among the pine needles, but there was no sign of Benjie. He was admitted after a parley by Mactavish, the lodge-keeper, and when he reached the door of the house he observed a large limousine being driven off to the back premises by a very smart chauffeur. Only Haripol was likely to own such a car, and Sir Archie reflected with amusement that the host of John Macnab was about to attend a full conclave of the Enemy.

The huge, ugly drawing-room looked almost beautiful in the yellow light of evening. A fire burned on the hearth after the fashion of Highland houses, even in summer, and before it stood Mr. Acheson Bandicott, with a small clean-shaven man, who was obviously the distinguished Professor in whose honour the feast was given, and Colonel Raden, a picturesque figure in kilt and velvet doublet, who seemed hard put to it to follow what was

clearly a technical colloquy. Agatha and Junius were admiring the sunset in the west window, and Janet was talking to a blond young man who seemed possessed of a singularly penetrating voice.

Sir Archie was unknown to most of the company, and when his name was announced every one except the Professor turned towards him with a lively curiosity. Old Mr. Bandicott was profuse in his welcome, Junius no less cordial, Colonel Raden approving, for indeed it was not in human nature to be cold towards so friendly a being as the Laird of Crask. Sir Archie was apologetic for his social misfeasances, congratulatory about Harald Blacktooth, eager to atone for the past by an exuberant neighbourliness.

'Been havin' a rotten time with the toothache,' he told his host, 'I roost up alone in my little barrack and keep company with birds. . . . Bit of a naturalist, you know. . . . Yes, sir, quite fit again, but my leg will never be much to boast of.'

Colonel Raden appraised the lean, athletic figure. 'You've been our mystery man, Sir Archibald. I'm almost sorry to meet you, for we lose our chief topic of discussion. You're fond of stalking they tell me. When are you coming to kill a stag at Glenraden?'

'When will you ask me?' Sir Archie laughed. 'I'm still fairly good on the hill, but just now I'm sittin' indoors all day tuggin' at my hair and tryin' to compose a speech.'

Colonel Raden's face asked for explanations.

'Day after to-morrow in Muirtown. Big Unionist meetin' and I've got to start the ball. It's jolly hard to know what to talk about, for I've a pretty high average of ignorance about everything. But I've decided to have a

shot at foreign policy. You see, Charles —' Sir Archie stopped in a fright. He had been within an ace of giving the show away.

'Of course. 'Pon my soul I had forgotten that you were our candidate. It's an uphill fight, I'm afraid. The people in these parts, sir, are the most obstinate reactionaries on the face of the globe, but they've been voting Liberal ever since the days of John Knox.'

Mr. Bandicott regarded Sir Archie with interest.

'So you're standing for Parliament,' he said. 'Few things impress me more in Great Britain than the way young men take up public life as if it were the natural coping-stone to their education. We have no such tradition, and we feel the absence of it. Junius would as soon think of running for Congress as of keeping a faro-saloon. Now I wonder, Sir Archibald, what induced you to take this step?'

But Sir Archie was gone, for he had seen the beckoning eyes of Janet Raden. That young woman, ever since she had heard that the Laird of Crask was coming to dinner, had looked forward to this occasion as her culminating triumph. He had been her confidant about the desperate John Macnab, and from her he must learn the tale of her victory. Her pleasure was increased by the consciousness that she was looking her best, for she knew that her black gown was a good French model and well set off her delicate colouring. She looked with eyes of friendship on him as he limped across the room, and noted his lean distinction. No other country, she thought, produced this kind of slim, graceful, yet weathered and hard-bitten youth.

'Do you know Mr. Claybody?'

Mr. Claybody said he was delighted to meet his neighbour again. 'It's years,' he said, 'since we met at Ronham. I spend my life in the train now, and never get more than a few days at a time at Haripol. But I've managed to secure a month this year to entertain my friends. I was looking forward in any case to seeing you at Muirtown on the 4th. I've been helping to organise the show, and I consider it a great score to have got Lamancha. This place has never been properly worked, and with a little efficient organisation we ought to put you in right enough. There's no doubt Scotland is changing, and you'll have the tide to help you.'

Mr. Claybody was a very splendid person. He looked rather like a larger edition of the great Napoleon, for he had the same full fleshy face, and his head was set on a thickish neck. His blond hair was beautifully sleek, and his clothes were of a perfection uncommon in September north of the Forth. Not that Mr. Claybody was either fat or dandified; he was only what the ballad calls 'fair of flesh,' and he employed a good tailor and an assiduous valet. His exact age was thirty-two, and he did not look older, once the observer had got over his curiously sophisticated eyes.

But Sir Archie was giving scant attention to Mr. Claybody.

'Have you heard,' Janet broke out, 'John Macnab came, saw, and didn't conquer?'

'I've heard nothing else the last two days.'

'And I was right! He is a gentleman.'

'No? Tell me all about the fellow.' Sir Archie's interest was perhaps less in the subject than in the animation which it woke in Janet's eyes.

But the announcement that dinner was served cut short the tale, though not before Sir Archie had noticed a sudden set of Mr. Claybody's jaw and a contraction of his eyebrows. 'Wonder if he means to stick to his lawyer's letter,' he communed with himself. 'In that case it's quod for Charles.'

The dining-room at Strathlarrig was a remnant of the old house which had been enveloped in the immense sheath of the new. It had eighteenth-century panelling unchanged since the days when Jacobite chiefs in lace and tartan had passed their claret-glasses over the water, and the pictures were all of forbidding progenitors. But the ancient narrow windows had been widened, and Sir Archie, from where he sat, had a prospect of half a mile of the river, including Lady Maisie's Pool, bathed in the clear amber of twilight. He was on his host's left hand, opposite the Professor, with Agatha Raden next to him; then came Junius: while Janet was between Johnson Claybody and the guest of the occasion.

Mr. Claybody still brooded over John Macnab.

'I call the whole thing infernal impertinence,' he said in his loud, assured voice. 'I confess I have ceased to admire undergraduate "rags." He threatens to visit us, and my father intends to put the matter into the hands of the police.'

'That would be very kind,' said Janet sweetly. 'You see, John Macnab won't have the slightest trouble in beating the police.'

'It's the principle of the thing, Miss Raden. Here is an impudent attack on private property, and if we treat it as a joke it will only encourage other scoundrels. If the man is a gentleman, as you say he is, it makes it more scandalous.'

'Come, come, Mr. Claybody, you're taking it too seriously.' Colonel Raden could be emphatic enough on the rights of property, but no Highlander can ever grow excited about trespass. 'The fellow has made a sporting offer and is willing to risk a pretty handsome stake. I rather admire what you call his impudence. I might have done the same thing as a young man, if I had the wits to think of it.'

Mr. Claybody was quick to recognise an unsympathetic audience. 'Oh, I don't mean that we're actually going to make a fuss. We'll give him a warm reception if he comes — that's all. But I don't like the spirit. It's too dangerous in these unsettled times. Once let the masses get into their heads that landed property is a thing to play tricks with, and you take the pin out of the whole system. You must agree with me, Roylance?'

Sir Archie, remembering his part, answered with guile. 'Rather! Rotten game for a gentleman, I think. All the same, the chap seems rather a sportsman, so I'm in favour of letting the law alone and dealing with him ourselves. I expect he won't have much of a look-in on Haripol.'

'I can promise you he won't,' said Mr. Claybody shortly.

Professor Babwater observed that it would be difficult for a descendant of Harald Blacktooth to be too hard on one who followed in Harald's steps. 'The Celt,' he said, 'has always sought his adventures in a fairy world. The Northman was a realist, and looked to tangible things like land and cattle. Therefore he was a conqueror and a discoverer on the terrestrial globe, while the Celt explored the mysteries of the spirit. Those who, like you, sir' —

he bowed to Colonel Raden — ‘have both strains in their ancestry, should have successes in both worlds.’

‘They don’t mix well,’ said the Colonel sadly. ‘There was my grandfather, who believed in Macpherson’s Ossian and ruined the family fortunes in hunting for Gaelic manuscripts on the continent of Europe. And his father was in India with Clive, and thought about nothing except blackmailing native chiefs till he made the place too hot to hold him. Look at my daughters, too. Agatha is mad about poetry and such-like, and Janet is a bandit. She’d have made a dashed good soldier, though.’

‘Thank you, Papa,’ said the lady. She might have objected to the description had she not seen that Sir Archie accepted it with admiring assent.

‘I suppose,’ said old Mr. Bandicott reflectively, ‘that the War was bound to leave a good deal of unsettlement. Junius missed it through being too young — never got out of a training camp — but I have noticed that those who fought in France find it difficult to discover a groove. They are energetic enough, but they won’t “stay put,” as we say. Perhaps this Macnab is one of the uprooted. In your country, where everybody was soldiering, the case must be far more common.’

Mr. Claybody announced that he was sick of hearing the War blamed for the average man’s deficiencies. ‘Every waster,’ he said, ‘makes an excuse of being shell-shocked. I’m very clear that the War twisted nothing in a man that wasn’t twisted before.’

Sir Archie demurred. ‘I don’t know. I’ve seen some pretty bad cases of fellows who used to be as sane as a judge, and came home all shot to bits in their mind.’

‘There are exceptions, of course. I’m speaking of the

general rule. I turn away unemployables every day — good soldiers, maybe, but unemployable — and I doubt if they were ever anything else.'

Something in his tone annoyed Janet.

'You saw a lot of service, didn't you?' she asked meekly.

'No — worse luck! They made me stick at home and slave fourteen hours a day at controlling cotton. It would have been a holiday for me to get into the trenches. But what I say is, a sane man usually remained sane. Look at Sir Archibald. We all know what a hectic time he had, and he hasn't turned a hair.'

'I'd like you to give me that in writing,' Sir Archie grinned. 'I've known people who thought I was rather cracked.'

'Anyhow, it made no difference to your nerves,' said Colonel Raden.

'I hope not. I expect that was because I enjoyed the beastly thing. Perhaps I'm naturally a bit of a bandit — like Miss Janet.'

'Perhaps you're John Macnab,' said the lady.

'Well, you've seen him and can judge.'

'No. I'll be a witness for the defence if you're ever accused. But you mustn't be offended at the idea. I suppose poor John Macnab is now crawling round Strathlarrig trying to find a gap between the gillies to cast a fly.'

'That's about the size of it,' Junius laughed. 'And there's twenty special correspondents in the neighbourhood cursing his name. If they get hold of him, they'll be savager than old Angus.'

Mr. Bandicott, after calling his guests' attention to the merits of a hock which he had just acquired — it was a Johannisberg with the blue label — declared that in his

belief the War would do good to English life, when the first ferment had died away.

‘As a profound admirer of British institutions,’ he said, ‘I have sometimes thought that they needed a little shaking up and loosening. In America our classes are fluid. The rich man of to-day began life in a shack, and the next generation may return to it. It is the same with our professions. The man who starts in the law may pass to railway management, and end as the proprietor of a department store.

‘Our belief is that it doesn’t matter how often you change your trade before you’re fifty. But an Englishman, once he settles in a profession, is fixed to it till the Day of Judgment, and in a few years he gets the mark of it so deep that he’d be a fish out of water in anything else. You can’t imagine one of your big barristers doing anything else. No fresh fields and pastures new for them. It would be a crime against Magna Charta to break loose and try company-promoting or cornering the meat trade for a little change.’

Professor Babwater observed that in England they sometimes — in his view to the country’s detriment — became politicians.

‘That’s the narrowest groove of all,’ said Mr. Bandicott with conviction. ‘In this country, once you start in on politics you’re fixed in a class and members of a hierarchy, and you’ve got to go on, however unfitted you may be for the job, because it’s a sort of high treason to weaken. In America a man tries politics as he tries other things, and if he finds the air of Washington uncongenial he quits, and tries newspapers, or Wall Street, or oil.’

‘Or the penitentiary,’ said Junius.

'And why not?' asked his father. 'I deplore criminal tendencies in any public man, but the possibility of such a downfall keeps the life human. It is very different in England. The respectability of your politicians is so awful that, when one of them backslides, every man of you combines to hush it up. There would be a revolution if the people got to suspect. Can you imagine a Cabinet Minister in the police court on a common vulgar charge?'

Professor Babwater said he could well imagine it — it was where most of them should be; but Colonel Raden agreed that the decencies had somehow to be preserved, even at the cost of a certain amount of humbug. 'But, excuse me,' he added, 'if I fail to see what good an occasional sentence of six months' hard would do to public life?'

'I don't want it to happen,' said his host, who was inspired by his own Johannisberg, 'but I'd like to think it *could* happen. The permanent possibility of it would supple the minds of your legislators. It would do this old country a power of good if now and then a Cabinet Minister took to brawling and went to gaol.'

It was a topic which naturally interested Sir Archie, but the theories of Mr. Bandicott passed by him unheeded. For his seat at the table gave him a view of the darkening glen, and he was aware that on that stage a stirring drama was being enacted. His host could see nothing, for it was behind him; the Professor would have had to screw his head round; to Sir Archie alone was vouchsafed a clear prospect. Janet saw that he was gazing abstractedly out of the window, but she did not realise that his eyes were strained and every nerve in him excitedly alive. . . .

For suddenly into his field of vision had darted a man. He was on the far side of the Larrig, running hard, and behind him, at a distance of some forty yards, followed another. At first he thought it was Leithen, but even in the dusk it was plain that it was a shorter man — younger, too, he looked, and of a notable activity. He was gaining on his pursuers, when the chase went out of sight. . . . Then Sir Archie heard a far-away whistling, and would have given much to fling open the window and look out. . . .

Five minutes passed and again the runner appeared — this time dripping wet and on the near side. Clearly not Leithen, for he wore a white sweater, which was a garment unknown to the Crask wardrobe. He must have been headed off upstream, and had doubled back. That way danger lay, and Sir Archie longed to warn him, for his route would bring him close to the peopled appendages of Strathlarrig House. . . . Even as he stared he saw what must mean the end, for two figures appeared for one second on the extreme left of his range of vision, and in front of the fugitive. He was running into their arms!

Sir Archie seized his glass of the blue-labelled Johannisberg, swallowed the wine the wrong way, and promptly choked.

When the Hispana crossed the Bridge of Larrig, His Majesty's late Attorney-General was modestly concealed in a bush of broom on the Crask side, from which he could watch the sullen stretches of the Lang Whang. He was carefully dressed for the part in a pair of Wattie Lithgow's old trousers much too short for him, a waistcoat and jacket which belonged to Sime the butler and

which had been made about the year 1890, and a vulgar flannel shirt borrowed from Shapp. He was innocent of a collar, he had not shaved for two days, and as he had forgotten to have his hair cut before leaving London his locks were of a disreputable length. Last, he had a shocking old hat of Sir Archie's from which the lining had long since gone. His hands were sunburnt and grubby, and he had removed his signet-ring. A light ten-foot greenheart rod lay beside him, already put up, and to the tapered line was fixed a tapered cast ending in a strange little cocked fly. As he waited, he was busy oiling fly and line.

His glass showed him an empty haugh, save for the figure of Jimsie at the far end close to the Wood of Larrigmore. The sun-warmed waters of the river drowsed in the long dead stretches, curled at rare intervals by the faintest western breeze. The banks were crisp green turf, scarcely broken by a boulder, but five yards from them the moss began — a wilderness of hags and tussocks. Somewhere in its depths he knew that Benjie lay coiled like an adder, waiting on events.

Leithen's plan, like all great strategy, was simple. Everything depended on having Jimsie out of sight of the Lang Whang for half an hour. Given that, he believed he might kill a salmon. He had marked out a pool where in the evening fish were usually stirring, one of those irrational haunts which no piscatorial psychologist has ever explained. If he could fish fine and far, he might cover it from a spot below a high bank where only the top of his rod would be visible to watchers at a distance. Unfortunately, that spot was on the other side of the stream. With such tackle, landing a salmon would be a

critical business, but there was one chance in ten that it might be accomplished; Benjie would be at hand to conceal the fish, and he himself would disappear silently into the Crask thickets. But every step bristled with horrid dangers. Jimsie might be faithful to his post — in which case it was hopeless; he might find the salmon dour, or a fish might break him in the landing, or Jimsie might return to find him brazenly tethered to forbidden game. It was no good thinking about it. On one thing he was decided: if he were caught, he would not try to escape. That would mean retreat in the direction of Crask, and an exploration of the Crask covers would assuredly reveal what must at all costs be concealed. No. He would go quietly into captivity, and trust to his base appearance to be let off with a drubbing.

As he waited, watching the pools turn from gold to bronze, as the sun sank behind the Glenraden peaks, he suffered the inevitable reaction. The absurdities seemed huge as mountains, the difficulties innumerable as the waves of the sea. There remained less than an hour in which there would be sufficient light to fish — Jimsie was immovable (he had just lit his pipe and was sitting in meditation on a big stone) — every moment the Larrig waters were cooling with the chill of evening. Leithen consulted his watch, and found it half-past eight. He had lost his wrist-watch, and had brought his hunter, attached to a thin gold chain. That was foolish, so he slipped the chain from his buttonhole and drew it through the arm-hole of his waistcoat.

Suddenly he rose to his feet, for things were happening at the far end of the haugh. Jimsie stood in an attitude of expectation — he seemed to be hearing something far up-

stream. Leithen heard it too, the cry of excited men. . . . Jimsie stood on one foot for a moment in doubt, then he turned and doubled towards the Wood of Larrigmore. . . . The gallant Crossby had got to business and was playing hare to the hounds inside the park wall. If human nature had not changed, Leithen thought, the whole force would presently join in the chase — Angus and Lennox and Jimsie and Davie and doubtless many volunteers. Heaven send fleetness and wind to the South London Harrier, for it was his duty to occupy the interest of every male in Strathlarrig till such time as he subsided with angry expostulations into captivity.

The road was empty, the valley was deserted, when Leithen raced across the bridge and up the south side of the river. It was not two hundred yards to his chosen stand, a spit of gravel below a high bank at the tail of a long pool. Close to the other bank, nearly thirty yards off, was the shelf where fish lay of an evening. He tested the water with his hand, and its temperature was at least sixty degrees. His theory, which he had learned long ago from the aged Bostonian, was that under such conditions some subconscious memory revived in salmon of their early days as parr when they fed on surface insects, and that they could be made to take a dry fly.

He got out his line to the required length with half a dozen casts in the air, and then put his fly three feet above the spot where a salmon was wont to lie. It was a curious type of cast, which he had been practising lately in the early morning, for by an adroit check he made the fly alight in a curl, so that it floated for a second or two with the leader in a straight line away from it. In this way he believed that the most suspicious fish would see

nothing to alarm him, nothing but a hapless insect derelict on the water.

Sir Archie had spoken truth in describing Leithen to Wattie Lithgow as an artist. His long, straight, delicate casts were art indeed. Like thistledown the fly dropped, like thistledown it floated over the head of the salmon, but like thistledown it was disregarded. There was, indeed, a faint stirring of curiosity. From where he stood Leithen could see that slight ruffling of the surface which means an observant fish. . . .

Already ten minutes had been spent in this barren art. The crisis craved other measures.

His new policy meant a short line, so with infinite stealth and care Leithen waded up the side of the water, sometimes treading precarious ledges of peat, sometimes waist-deep in mud and pond-weed, till he was within twenty feet of the fishing-ground. Here he had not the high bank for a shelter, and would have been sadly conspicuous to Jimsie, had that sentinel remained at his post. He crouched low and cast as before with the same curl just ahead of the chosen spot.

But now his tactics were different. So soon as the fly had floated past where he believed the fish to be, he sank it by a dexterous twist of the rod-point, possible only with a short line. The fly was no longer a winged thing; drawn away under water, it roused in the salmon early memories of succulent nymphs. . . . At the first cast there was a slight swirl which meant that a fish near the surface had turned to follow the lure. The second cast the line straightened and moved swiftly upstream.

Leithen had killed in his day many hundreds of salmon — once in Norway a notable beast of fifty-five pounds.

But no salmon he had ever hooked had stirred in his breast such excitement as this modest fellow of eight pounds. "'Tis not so wide as a church-door," he reflected with Mercutio, "'but 'twill suffice" — if I can only land him.' But a dry-fly cast and a ten-foot rod are a frail wherewithal for killing a fish against time. With his ordinary fifteen-footer and gut of moderate strength he could have brought the little salmon to grass in five minutes, but now there was immense risk of a break, and a break would mean that the whole enterprise had failed. He dared not exert pressure; on the other hand, he could not follow the fish except by making himself conspicuous on the greensward. Worst of all, he had at the best ten minutes for the job.

Thirty yards off an otter slid into the water. Leithen wished he was King of the Otters, as in the Highland tale, to summon the brute to his aid.

The ten minutes had lengthened to fifteen — nine hundred seconds of heart-disease — when, wet to the waist, he got his pocket gaff into the salmon's side and drew it on to the spit of gravel where he had started fishing. A dozen times he thought he had lost, and once when the fish ran straight up the pool his line was carried out to its last yard of backing. He gave thanks to high Heaven, when, as he landed it, he observed that the fly had all but lost its hold and in another minute would have been free. By such narrow margins are great deeds accomplished.

He snapped the cast from the line and buried it in mud. Then cautiously he raised his head above the high bank. The gloaming was gathering fast, and so far as he could see the haugh was still empty. Pushing his rod along the ground he scrambled on to the turf.

Then he had a grievous shock. Jimsie had reappeared, and he was in full view of him. Moreover, there were two men on bicycles coming up the road, who, with the deplorable instinct of human nature, would be certain to join in any pursuit. He was on turf as short as a lawn, cumbered with a telltale rod and a poached salmon. The friendly hags were a dozen yards off, and before he could reach them his damning baggage would be noted.

At this supreme moment he had an inspiration, derived from the memory of the otter. To get out his knife, cut a ragged wedge from the fish, and roll it in his handkerchief was the work of three seconds. To tilt the rod over the bank so that it lay in the deep shadow was the work of three more . . . Jimsie had seen him, for a wild cry came down the stream, a cry which brought the cyclists off their machines and set them staring in his direction. Leithen dropped his gaff after the rod, and began running towards the Larrig Bridge — slowly, limpingly, like a frightened man with no resolute purpose of escape. And as he ran he prayed that Benjie from the deeps of the moss had seen what had been done and drawn the proper inference.

It was a bold bluff, for he had decided to make the salmon evidence for, not against, him. He hobbled down the bank, looking over his shoulder often as if in terror, and almost ran into the arms of the cyclists, who, warned by Jimsie's yells, were waiting to intercept him. He dodged them, however, and cut across to the road, for he had seen that Jimsie had paused and had noted the salmon lying blatantly on the sward, a silver splash in the twilight. Leithen doubled up the road as if going towards Strathlarrig, and Jimsie, the fleet of foot, did not catch

up with him till almost on the edge of the Wood of Larrigmore. The cyclists, who had remounted, arrived at the same moment to find a wretched muddy tramp in the grip of a stalwart but breathless gillie.

‘I tell ye I was daein’ nae harm,’ the tramp whined. ‘I was walkin’ up the water-side — there’s nae law to keep a body frae walkin’ up a waterside when there’s nae fence — and I seen an auld otter killin’ a saumon. The fish is there still to prove I’m no leein’.’

‘There is a fush, but you wass thinkin’ to steal the fush, and you would have had it in your breeks if I hadna seen you. That is poachin’, ma man, and you will come up to Strathlarrig. The master said that any one goin’ near the watter was to be lockit up, and you will be lockit up. You can tell all the lees you like in the mornin’.’

Then a thought struck Jimsie. He wanted the salmon, for the subject of otters in the Larrig had long been a matter of dispute between him and Angus, and here was evidence for his own view.

‘Would you two gentlemen oblige me by watchin’ this man while I rin back and get the fush? Bash him on the head if he offers to rin.’

The cyclists, who were journalists out to enjoy the evening air, willingly agreed, but Leithen showed no wish to escape. He begged a fag in a beggar’s whine, and, since he seemed peaceable, the two kept a good distance for fear of infection. He stood making damp streaks in the dusty road, a pitiable specimen of humanity, for his original get-up was not improved by the liquefaction of his clothes and a generous legacy of slimy peat. He seemed to be nervous, which, indeed, he was, for if Benjie had not seized his chance he was utterly done,

and if Jimsie should light upon his rod he was gravely compromised.

But when Jimsie returned in a matter of ten minutes it was empty-handed.

'I never kenned the like,' he proclaimed. 'That otter has come back and gotten the fush. Ach, the maleecious brute!'

The rest of Leithen's progress was not triumphant. He was conducted to the Strathlarrig lodge, where Angus, whose temper and wind had alike been ruined by the pursuit of Crossby, laid savage hands upon him, and frog-marched him to the back premises. The head keeper scarcely heeded Jimsie's tale. 'Ach, ye poachin' va-aga-bond. It is the jyle ye'll get,' he roared, for Angus was in a mood which could only be relieved by violence of speech and action. Rumbling Gaelic imprecations, he hustled his prisoner into an outhouse, which had once been a larder and was now a supplementary garage, slammed and locked the door, and, as a final warning, kicked it viciously with his foot, as if to signify what awaited the culprit when the time came to sit on his case.

Sir Archie, if not a skeleton at the feast, was no better than a shadow. The fragment of drama which he had witnessed had rudely divorced his mind from the intelligent conversation of Mr. Bandicott, he was no longer slightly irritated by Mr. Claybody, he forgot even the attractions of Janet. What was going on in that twilit vale? Lady Maisie's pool had still a shimmer of gold, but the woods were now purple and the waterside turf a dim amethyst, the colour of the darkening sky. All sound had

ceased, except the rare cry of a bird from the hill, and the hoot of a wandering owl. . . . Crossby had beyond doubt been taken, but where was Leithen?

He was recalled to his surroundings by Janet's announcement that Mr. Bandicott proposed to take them all in his car to the meeting at Muirtown.

'Oh, I say,' he pleaded, 'I'd much rather you didn't. I haven't a notion how to speak — no experience, you see — only about the third time I've opened my mouth in public. I'll make an awful ass of myself, and I'd much rather my friends didn't see it. If I know you're in the audience, Miss Janet, I won't be able to get a word out.'

Mr. Bandicott was sympathetic. 'Take my advice, and do not attempt to write a speech and get it by heart. Fill yourself with your subject, but do not prepare anything except the first sentence and the last. You'll find the words come easily when you once begin — if you have something you really want to say.'

'That's the trouble — I haven't. I'm goin' to speak about foreign policy, and I'm dashed if I can remember which treaty is which, and what the French are making a fuss about, or why the old Boche can't pay. And I keep on mixin' up Poincaré and Mussolini. . . . I'm goin' to write it all down, and if I'm stuck I'll fish out the paper and read it. I'm told there are fellows in the Cabinet who do that.'

'Don't stick too close to the paper,' the Colonel advised. 'The Highlander objects to sermons read to him, and he may not like a "read" speech.'

'Whatever he does I'm sure Sir Archibald will be most enlightening,' Mr. Bandicott said politely. 'Also I

want to hear Lord Lamancha. We think rather well of that young man in America. How do you rate him here?’

Mr. Claybody, as an inhabitant of the great world, replied: ‘Very high — in his own line. He’s the old-fashioned type of British statesman, and people trust him. The trouble about him and his kind is that they’re a little too far removed from the ordinary man — they’ve been too cosseted and set on a pedestal all their lives. They don’t quite know how to handle democracy. You can’t imagine Lamancha rubbing shoulders with Tom, Dick, and Harry.’

‘Oh, come!’ Sir Archie broke in. ‘In the War he started as a captain in a yeomanry regiment, and he commanded a pretty rough Australian push in Palestine. His men fairly swore by him.’

‘I dare say,’ said the other coldly. ‘The War doesn’t count for my argument, and Australians are not quite what I mean.’

The butler, who was offering liqueurs, was seen to speak confidentially to Junius, who looked towards his father, made as if to speak, and thought better of it. The older Mr. Bandicott was once more holding the table.

‘My archæological studies,’ he said, ‘and my son’s devotion to sport are apt to circumscribe the interest of my visits to this country. I do not spend more than a couple of days in London, and when I am there the place is empty. Sometimes I regret that I have not attempted to see more of English society in recent years, for there are many figures in it I would like to meet. There are some acquaintances, too, that I should be delighted to revive. Do you know Sir Edward Leithen, Mr. Clay-

body? He was recently, I think, the British Attorney-General.'

Mr. Claybody nodded. 'I know him very well. We have just briefed him in a big case.'

'Sir Edward Leithen visited us two years ago as the guest of our Bar Association. His address was one of the most remarkable I have ever listened to. It was on John Marshall — the finest tribute ever paid to that great man, and one which I venture to say no American could have equalled. I had very little talk with him, but what I had impressed me profoundly with the breadth of his outlook and the powers of his mind. Yes, I should like to meet Sir Edward Leithen again.'

The company had risen and were moving towards the drawing-room.

'Now I wonder,' Mr. Claybody was saying. 'I heard that Leithen was somewhere in Scotland. I wonder if I could get him up for a few days to Haripol. Then I could bring him over here.'

An awful joy fell upon Sir Archie's soul. He realised anew the unplumbed preposterousness of life.

Ere they reached the drawing-room, Junius took Agatha aside.

'Look here, Miss Agatha, I want you to help me. The gillies have been a little too active. They've gathered in some wretched hobo they found looking at the river, and they've annexed a journalist who stuck his nose inside the gates. It's the journalist that's worrying me. From his card he seems to be rather a swell in his way — represents the "Monitor" and writes for my father's New York paper. He gave the gillies a fine race for their money, and now he's sitting cursing in the garage and

vowing every kind of revenge. It won't do to antagonise the Press, so we'd better let him out and grovel to him, if he wants apologies. . . . The fact is we're not in a very strong position, fending off the newspapers from Harald Blacktooth because of this ridiculous John Macnab. If you could let the fellow out it would be casting oil on the troubled waters. You could smooth him down far better than me.'

'But what about the other? A hobo, you say! That's a tramp, isn't it?'

'Oh, tell Angus to let him out too. Here are the keys of both garages. I don't want to turn this place into a lock-up. Angus won't be pleased, but we have to keep a sharp watch for John Macnab to-morrow and it's bad tactics in a campaign to cumber yourself with prisoners.'

The two threaded mysterious passages and came out into a moonlit stable-yard. Junius handed the girl a great electric torch. 'Tell the fellow we eat dirt for our servants' officiousness. Offer him supper, and — I tell you what — ask him to lunch the day after to-morrow. No, that's the Muirtown day. Find out his address and say we'll write to him and give him first chop at the Viking. Blame it all on the gillies.'

Agatha unlocked the door of the big garage and to her surprise found it brilliantly lit with electric light. Mr. Crossby was sitting in the driver's seat of a large motor-car, smoking a pipe and composing a story for his paper. At the sight of Agatha he descended hastily.

'We're so sorry,' said the girl. 'It's all been a stupid mistake. But, you know, you shouldn't have run away. Mr. Bandicott had to make rules to keep off poachers, and you ought to have stopped and explained who you were.'

To this charming lady in the grass-green gown Mr. Crossby's manner was debonair and reassuring.

'No apology is needed. It wasn't in the least the gillies' blame. I wanted some exercise, and I had my fun with them. One of the young ones has a pretty turn of speed. But I oughtn't to have done it — I quite see that — with everybody here on edge about this John Macnab. Have I your permission to go?'

'Indeed you have. Mr. Bandicott asked me to apologise most humbly. You're quite free unless — unless you'd like to have supper before you go.'

Mr. Crossby excused himself, and did not stay upon the order of his going. He knew nothing of the fate of his colleague, and hoped that he might pick up news from Benjie in the neighbourhood of the Wood of Lar-rigmore.

The other garage stood retired in the lee of a clump of pines — a rude, old-fashioned place, which generally housed the station lorry. Agatha, rather than face the disappointed Angus, decided to complete the task of gaol-delivery herself. She had trouble with the lock, and when the door opened she looked into a pit of darkness scarcely lightened by the outer glow of moonshine. She flashed the torch into the interior and saw, seated on a stack of petrol tins, the figure of the tramp.

Leithen, who had been wondering how he was to find a bed in that stony place, beheld the apparition with amazement. He guessed that it was one of the Miss Radens, for he knew that they were dining at Strath-larrig. As he stood sheepishly before her, his wits suffered a dislocation which drove out of his head the remembrance of the part he had assumed.

'Mr. Bandicott sent me to tell you that you can go away,' the girl said nervously.

'Thank you very much,' said Leithen in his ordinary voice.

Now in the scramble up the river-bank and in the rough handling of Angus his garments had become disarranged, and his watch had swung out of his pocket. In adjusting it in the garage he had put it back in its normal place, so that the chain showed on Sime's ancient waistcoat. From it depended one of those squat little gold shields which are the badge of athletic prowess at a famous school. As he stood in the light of her torch, Agatha noted this shield, and knew what it signified. Also his tone when he spoke had startled her.

'Oh!' she cried, 'you were at Eton?'

Leithen was for a moment nonplussed. He thought of a dozen lies and then decided on qualified truth.

'Yes,' he murmured shamefacedly. 'Long ago I was at Eton.'

The girl flushed with embarrassed sympathy.

'What — what brought you to this?' she murmured.

'Folly,' said Leithen, recovering himself. 'Drink and such-like. I have had a lot of bad luck, but I've mostly myself to blame.'

'You're only a tramp now?' Angels might have envied the melting sadness of her voice.

'At present. Sometimes I get a job, but I can't hold it down.' Leithen was warming to his work, and his tones were a subtle study in dilapidated gentility.

'Can't anything be done?' Agatha asked, twining her pretty hands.

'Nothing,' was the dismal answer. 'I'm past helping. Let me go, please, and forget you ever saw me.'

‘But can’t Papa . . . won’t you tell me your name or where we can find you?’

‘My present name is not my own. Forget about me, my dear young lady. The life isn’t so bad. . . . I’m as happy as I deserve to be. I want to be off, for I don’t like to stumble upon gentlefolks.’

She stood aside to let him pass, noting the ruin of his clothes, his dirty unshaven face, the shameless old hat that he raised to her. Then, melancholy and reflective, she returned to Junius. She could not give away one of her own class, so, when Junius asked her about the tramp, she only shrugged her white shoulders. ‘A miserable creature. I hope Angus wasn’t too rough with him. He looked as if a puff of wind would blow him to pieces.’

Ten minutes later Leithen, having unobtrusively climbed the park wall and so escaped the attention of Mactavish at the lodge, was trotting at a remarkable pace for a tramp down the road to the Larrig Bridge. Once on the Crask side, he stopped to reconnoitre. Crossby called softly to him from the covert and with Crossby was Benjie.

‘I’ve gotten the saumon,’ said the latter, ‘and your rod and gaff too. Hae ye the bit you howkit out o’ the fush?’

Leithen produced his bloody handkerchief.

‘Now for supper, Benjie my lad,’ he cried. ‘Come along, Crossby, and we’ll drink the health of John Macnab.’

The journalist shook his head. ‘I’m off to finish my story. The triumphant return of Harald Blacktooth is going to convulse these islands to-morrow.’

CHAPTER VIII

SIR ARCHIE IS INSTRUCTED IN A CONDUCT OF LIFE

EARLY next morning, when the great door of Strathlarrig House was opened and the maids had begun their work, Oliphant, the butler — a stately man who had been trained in a ducal family — crossed the hall to reconnoitre the outer world. There he found an under-housemaid, nursing a strange package which she averred she had found on the doorstep. It was some two feet long, swathed in brown paper, and attached to its string was a letter inscribed to Mr. Junius Bandicott.

The parcel was clammy and Oliphant handled it gingerly. He cut the cord, disentangled the letter, and revealed an oblong of green rushes bound with string. The wrapping must have been insecure, for something forthwith slipped from the rushes and flopped on the marble floor, revealing to Oliphant's disgusted eyes a small salmon, blue and stiff in death.

At that moment Junius, always an early bird, came whistling downstairs. So completely was he convinced of the inviolability of the Strathlarrig waters that the spectacle caused him no foreboding.

'What are you flinging fish about for, Oliphant?' he asked cheerfully.

The butler presented him with the envelope. He opened it and extracted a dirty half-sheet of note-paper, on which was printed in capitals, 'With the compliments of John Macnab.'

Amazement, chagrin, amusement followed each other on Junius's open countenance. Then he picked up the fish and marched out of doors shouting 'Angus' at the top of a notably powerful voice. The sound brought the scared face of Professor Babwater to his bedroom window.

Angus, who had been up since four, appeared from Lady Maisie's pool, where he had been contemplating the waters. His vigil had not improved his appearance or his temper, for his eye was red and choleric and his beard was wild as a mountain goat's. He cast one look at the salmon, surmised the truth, and held up imploring hands to Heaven.

'John Macnab!' said Junius sternly. 'What have you got to say to that?'

Angus had nothing audible to say. He was handling the fish with feverish hands and peering at its jaws, and presently under his fingers a segment fell out.

'That fush was cleekit,' observed Lennox, who had come up. 'It was never catched with a flee.'

'Ye're a leear,' Angus roared. 'Just tak a look at the mouth of it. There's the mark of the huke, ye gommeril. The fush was took wi' a rod and line.'

'You may reckon it was,' observed Junius. 'I trust John Macnab to abide by the rules of the game.'

Suddenly light seemed to break in on Angus's soul. He bellowed for Jimsie, who was placidly making his way towards the group at the door, lighting his pipe as he went.

'Look at that, James Mackenzie. Aye, look at it. Feast your een on it. You wass tellin' me there wass otters in the Larrig and I said there wass not. You wass tellin' me there wass an otter had a fush last night at

the Lang Whang. There's your otter and be damned to ye!'

Jimsie, slow of comprehension, rubbed his eyes. 'Where wass you findin' the fush? Aye, it's the one I seen last night. That otter must be wrang in the heid.'

'It is not wrang in the heid. It's you that are wrang in the heid, James Mackenzie. The otter is a ver-ra clever man, and its name will be John Macnab.'

Slowly enlightenment dawned on Jimsie's mind.

'He was the tramp,' he ingeminated. 'He was the tramp.'

'And he's still lockit up,' Angus cried joyfully. 'Wait till I get my hands on him.' He was striding off for the garage when a word from Junius held him back.

'You won't find him there. I gave orders last night to let him go. You know, Angus, you told me he was only a tramp that had been seen walking up the river.'

'We will catch him yet!' cried the vindictive head keeper. 'Get you on your bicycle, Jimsie, and away after him. He'll be on the Muirtown road. . . . There's just the one road he can travel.'

'No, you don't,' said Junius. 'I don't want him here. He has beaten us fairly in a match of wits, and the business is finished.'

'But the thing's no possible,' Jimsie moaned. 'The skeeliest fisher would not take a saumon in the Lang Whang with a flee. . . . And I wasna away many meenutes. . . . And the tramp was a poor shilpit body — not like a fisher or any kind of gentleman at all — at all. . . . And he hadna a rod. . . . The thing's no possible.'

'Well, who else could it be?'

'I think it was the Deevil.'

Jimsie, cross-examined, went over the details of his evening's experience.

'The journalist may have been in league with him — or he may not,' Junius reflected. 'Anyway, I'll tackle Mr. Crossby. I want to find out what I can about this remarkable sportsman.'

'You will not find out anything at all, at all,' said Angus morosely. 'For I tell ye, sir, Jimsie is right in one thing — Macnab is not a man — he is the Deevil.'

'Then we needn't be ashamed of being beat by him ... Look here, you men. We've lost, but you've had an uncomfortable time these last twenty-four hours. And I'm going to give you what I promised you if we won out. I reckon the market price of salmon is not more than fifty cents a pound. Macnab has paid about thirty dollars a pound for this fish, so we've a fair margin on the deal.'

Mr. Acheson Bandicott received the news with composure, if not with relief. Now he need no longer hold the correspondents at arm's length, but could summon them to his presence and enlarge on Harald Blacktooth. His father's equanimity cast whatever balm was needed upon Junius's wounded pride, and presently he saw nothing in the affair but comedy. His thoughts turned to Glenraden. It might be well for him to announce in person that the defences of Strathlarrig had failed.

On his way he called at the post-office where Agatha had told him that Crossby was lodging. He wanted a word with the journalist, who clearly must have been *particeps criminis*, and as he could offer as bribe the first full tale of Harald Blacktooth (to be unfolded before the other correspondents arrived for luncheon), he hoped to acquire a story in return. But, according to the post-

mistress, Mr. Crossby had gone. He had sat up most of the night writing, and, without waiting for breakfast, had paid his bill, strapped on his ruck-sack, and departed on his bicycle.

Junius found the Raden family on the lawn, and with them Archie Roylance.

‘Got up early to go over my speech for to-morrow,’ the young man explained. ‘I’m gettin’ the dashed thing by heart — only way to avoid regrettable incidents. I started off down the hill repeatin’ my eloquence, and before I knew I was at Glenraden gates, so I thought I’d come in and pass the time of day . . . Jolly interestin’ dinner last night, Bandicott. I liked your old Professor. . . . Any news of John Macnab?’

‘There certainly is. He has us beat to a frazzle. This morning there was a salmon on the doorstep presented with his compliments.’

The effect of this announcement was instant and stupendous. The Colonel called upon his gods. ‘Not killed fair? It’s a stark impossibility, sir. You had the water guarded like the Bank of England.’ Archie expressed like suspicions; Agatha was sad and sympathetic, Janet amused, and covertly joyful.

‘I reckon it was fair enough fishing,’ Junius went on. ‘I’ve been trying to puzzle the thing out, and this is what I make of it. Macnab was in league with one of those press men, who started out to trespass inside the park and drew off all the watchers in pursuit, including the man at the Lang Whang. He had them hunting him for about half an hour, and in that time Macnab killed his fish. . . . He must be a dandy at the game, too, to get a salmon in that dead water. . . . Jimsie — that’s the man

who was supposed to watch the Lang Whang — returned before he could get away with the beast, so what does the fellow do but dig a bit out of the fish and leave it on the bank, while he lures Jimsie to chase him. Jimsie saw the fish and put it down to an otter, and by and by caught the man up the road. There must have been an accomplice in hiding, for when Jimsie went back to pick up the salmon it had disappeared. The fellow, who looked like a hobo, was shut up in a garage, and after dinner we let him go, for we had nothing against him, and now he is rejoicing somewhere at our simplicity. . . . It was a mighty clever bit of work, and I'm not ashamed to be beaten by that class of artist. I hoped to get hold of the press man and find out something, but the press man seems to have leaked out of the landscape.'

'Was that tramp John Macnab?' Agatha asked in an agitated voice.

'None other. You let him out, Miss Agatha. What was he like? I can't get proper hold of Jimsie's talk.'

'Oh, I should have guessed,' the girl lamented. 'For, of course, I saw he was a gentleman. He was in horrible old clothes, but he had an Eton shield on his watch-chain. He seemed to be ashamed to remember it. He said he had come down in the world — through drink!'

Archie struggled hard with the emotions evoked by this description of an abstemious personage currently believed to be making an income of forty thousand pounds.

'Then we've both seen him,' Janet cried. 'Describe him, Agatha. Was he youngish and big, and fair-haired, and sunburnt? Had he blue eyes?'

'No-o. He wasn't like that. He was about Papa's

height, and rather slim, I think. He was very dirty and hadn't shaved, but I should say he was sallow, and his eyes — well, they were certainly not blue.'

'Are you certain? You only saw him in the dark.'

'Yes, quite certain. I had a big torch which lit up his whole figure. Now I come to think of it he had a striking face — he looked like somebody very clever — a judge, perhaps. That should have made me suspicious, but I was so shocked to see such a downfall that I didn't think about it.'

Janet looked wildly around her. 'Then there are two John Macnabs.'

'Angus thinks he is the Deevil,' said Junius.

'It looks as if he were a syndicate,' said Archie, who felt that some remark was expected of him.

'Well, I'm not complaining,' said Junius. 'And now we're off the stage, and can watch the play from the boxes. I hope you won't be shocked, sir, but I wouldn't break my heart if John Macnab got the goods from Haripol.'

'By Gad, no!' cried the Colonel. ''Pon my soul, if I could get into touch with the fellow I'd offer to help him — though he'd probably be too much of a sportsman to let me. That young Claybody wants taking down a peg or two. He's the most insufferably assured young prig I ever met in my life.'

'He looked the kind of chap who might turn nasty,' Sir Archie observed.

'How do you mean?' Junius asked. 'Get busy with a gun — that sort of thing?'

'Lord, no. The Claybodys are not likely to start shootin'. But they're as rich as Jews, and they're capable

of hirin' prize-fighters, or puttin' a live wire round the forest. Or I'll tell you what they might do — they might drive every beast on Haripol over the marches and keep 'em out for three days. It would wreck the ground for the season, but they wouldn't mind that — the old man can't get up the hills and the young 'un don't want to.'

'Agatha, my dear,' said her father, 'we ought to return the Claybodys' call. Perhaps Mr. Junius would drive us over there in his car this afternoon. For, of course, you'll stay to luncheon, Bandicott — and you, too, Roylance.'

Sir Archie stayed to luncheon; he also stayed to tea; and between these meals he went through a memorable experience. For, after the others had started for Haripol, Janet and he drifted aimlessly towards the Raden Bridge and then upward through the pinewoods on the road to Carnmore. The strong sun was tempered by the flickering shade of the trees, and, as the road wound itself out of the crannies of the woods to the bare ridges, light wandering winds cooled the cheek, and, mingled with the fragrance of heather and the rooty smell of bogs, came a salty freshness from the sea. The wide landscape was as luminous as April — a bad presage for the weather, since the Haripol peaks, which in September should have been dim in a mulberry haze, stood out sharp like cameos. The two did not talk much, for they were getting beyond the stage where formal conversation is felt to be necessary. Sir Archie limped along at a round pace, which was easily matched by the girl at his side. Both would instinctively halt now and then, and survey the prospect without speaking, and both felt that these pregnant silences were bringing them very near to one another.

At last the track ran out in scree, and from a bald

summit they were looking down on the first of the Carnmore corries. Janet seated herself on a mossy ledge of rock and looked back into the Raden glen, which from this altitude had the appearance of an enclosed garden. The meadows of the lower haugh lay green in the sun, the setting of pines by some freak of light was a dark and cloudy blue, and the little castle rose in the midst of the trees with a startling brightness like carved marble. The picture was as exquisite and strange as an illumination in a missal.

‘Gad, what a place to live in!’ Sir Archie exclaimed.

The girl, who had been gazing at the scene with her chin in her hands, turned on him eyes which were suddenly wistful and rather sad. As contrasted with her sister’s, Janet’s face had a fine hard finish which gave it a brilliancy like an eager boy’s. But now a cloud wrack had been drawn over the sun.

‘We’ve lived there,’ she said, ‘since Harald Blacktooth — at least Papa says so. But the end is very near now. We are the very last of the Radens. And that is as it should be, you know.’

‘I’m hanged if I see that,’ Sir Archie began, but the girl interrupted.

‘Yes, it is as it should be. The old life of the Highlands is going, and people like ourselves must go with it. There’s no reason why we should continue to exist. We’ve long ago lost our justification.’

‘D’you mean to say that fellows like Claybody have more right to be here?’

‘Yes. I think they have, because they’re fighters and we’re only survivals. They will disappear, too, unless they learn their lesson. . . . You see, for a thousand years

we have been going on here, and other people like us, but we only endured because we were alive. We have the usual conventional motto on our coat of arms — *Pro Deo et Rege* — a Heralds College invention. But our Gaelic motto was very different — it was “Sons of Dogs, come and I will give you flesh.” As long as we lived up to that we flourished, but as soon as we settled down and went to sleep and became *rentiers* we were bound to decay. . . . My cousins at Glenaicill were just the same. Their motto was “What I have I hold,” and while they remembered it they were great people. But when they stopped holding they went out like a candle, and the last of them is now living at St. Malo and a Lancashire cotton-spinner owns the place. . . . When we had to fight hard for our possessions all the time, and give flesh to the sons of dogs who were our clan, we were strong men and women. There was a Raden with Robert Bruce — he fell with Douglas in the pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre — and a Raden died beside the King at Flodden — and Radens were in everything that happened in the old days in Scotland and France. But civilisation killed them — they couldn’t adapt themselves to it. Somehow the fire went out of the blood, and they became vegetables. Their only claim was the right of property, which is no right at all.’

‘That’s what the Bolsheviks say,’ said the puzzled Sir Archie.

‘Then I’m a Bolshevik. Nobody in the world to-day has a right to anything which he can’t justify. That’s not politics, it’s the way Nature works. Whatever you’ve got — rank or power or fame or money — you’ve got to justify it, and keep on justifying it, or go under. No law

on earth can buttress up a thing which Nature means to decay.'

'D'you know that sounds to me pretty steep doctrine?'

'No, it isn't. It isn't doctrine, and it isn't politics, it's common-sense. I don't mean that we want some silly government redistributing everybody's property. I mean that people should realise that whatever they've got they hold under a perpetual challenge, and they are bound to meet that challenge. Then we'll have living creatures instead of mummies.'

Sir Archie stroked his chin thoughtfully. 'I dare say there's a lot in that. But what would Colonel Raden say to it?'

'He would say I was a bandit. And yet he would probably agree with me in the end. Agatha wouldn't, of course. She adores decay — sad old memories and lost causes and all the rest of it. She's a sentimentalist, and she'll marry Junius and go to America, where everybody is sentimental, and be the sweetest thing in the Western hemisphere and live happy ever after. I'm quite different. I believe I'm kind, but I'm certainly hard-hearted. I suppose it's Harald Blacktooth coming out.'

Janet had got off her perch, and was standing a yard from Sir Archie, her hat in her hand and the light wind ruffling her hair. The young man, who had no skill in analysing his feelings, felt obscurely that she fitted most exquisitely into the picture of rock and wood and water, that she was, in very truth, a part of this clean elemental world of the hilltops.

'What about yourself?' she asked. 'In the words of Mr. Bandicott, are you going to make good?'

She asked the question with such an air of frank com-

radeship that Sir Archie was in no way embarrassed. Indeed he was immensely delighted.

'I hope so,' he said. 'But I don't know. . . . I'm a bit of a slacker. There doesn't seem much worth doing since the War.'

'What nonsense! You find a thousand things worth doing, but they're not enough — and they're not big enough. Do you mean to say you want to hang up your hat at your age and go to sleep? You need to be challenged.'

'I expect I do,' he murmured.

'Well, I challenge you. You're fit and you're young, and you did extraordinarily well in the War, and you've hosts of friends, and — and — you're well off, aren't you?'

'Pretty fair. You see, I had a long minority, and — oh, yes, I've far more money than I want.'

'There you are. I challenge you. You're bound to justify what you've got. I won't have you idling away your life till you end as the kind of lean brown old gentleman in a bowler hat that one sees at Newmarket. It's a very nice type, but it's not good enough for you, and I won't have it. You must not be a dilettante pottering about with birds and a little sport and a little politics.'

Sir Archie had been preached at occasionally in his life, but never quite in this way. He was preposterously pleased and also a little solemnised.

'I'm quite serious about politics.'

'I wonder,' said Janet, smiling. 'I don't mean scraping into Parliament, but real politics — putting the broken pieces together, you know. Papa and the rest of our class

want to treat politics like another kind of property in which they have a vested interest. But it won't do — not in the world we live in to-day. If you're going to do any good you must feel the challenge and be ready to meet it. And then you must become yourself a challenger. You must be like John Macnab.'

Sir Archie stared.

'I don't mean that I want you to make poaching wagers like John. You can't live in a place and play those tricks with your neighbours. But I want you to follow what Mr. Bandicott would call the "John Macnab proposition." It's so good for everybody concerned. Papa has never had so much fun out of his forest as in the days he was repelling invasion, and even Mr. Junius found a new interest in the Larrig . . . I'm all for property, if you can defend it, but there are too many fatted calves in the world.'

Sir Archie suddenly broke into loud laughter.

'Most people tell me I'm too mad to do much good in anything. But you say I'm not mad enough. Well, I'm all for challengin' the fatted calves, but I don't fancy that's the road that leads to the Cabinet. More likely the gaol, with a red flag firmly clenched in my manly hand.'

The girl laughed too. 'Papa says that the man who doesn't give a damn for anybody can do anything he likes in the world. Most people give many damns for all kinds of foolish things. Mr. Claybody, for example — his smart friends, like Lord Lamancha and the Attorney-General — what is his name? — Leithen? — and his silly little position, and his father's new peerage. But you're not like that. I believe that all wisdom consists in

caring immensely for the few right things and not caring a straw about the rest.'

Had any one hinted to Sir Archie that a young woman on a Scots mountain could lecture him gravely on his future and still remain a ravishing and adorable thing he would have dismissed the suggestion with incredulity. At the back of his head he had that fear of women as something mysterious and unintelligible which belongs to a motherless and sisterless childhood, and a youth spent almost wholly in the company of men. He had immense compassion for a sex which seemed to him to have a hard patch to hoe in the world, and this pitifulness had always kept him from any conduct which might harm a woman. His numerous fancies had been light and transient like thistledown, and his heart had been wholly unscathed. Fear that he might stumble into marriage had made him as shy as a woodcock — a fear not without grounds, for a friend had once proposed to write a book called 'Lives of the Hunted,' with a chapter on Archie. Wherefore, his hour having come, he had cascaded into love with desperate completeness, and with the freshness of a mind unstaled by disillusion. . . . All he knew was that a miraculous being had suddenly flooded his world with a new radiance, and was now opening doors and inviting him to dazzling prospects. He felt at once marvellously confident, and supremely humble. Never had mistress a more docile pupil.

They wandered back to the house, and Janet gave him tea in a room full of faded chintzes and Chinese-Chippendale mirrors. Then, when the sun was declining behind the Carnmore peaks, Sir Archie at last took his leave. His head was in a happy confusion, but two ideas

rose above the surge — he would seize the earliest chance of asking Janet to marry him, and by all his gods he must not make a fool of himself at Muirtown. She had challenged him, and he had accepted the challenge; he must make it good before he could become in turn a challenger. It may be doubted if Sir Archie had any very clear notions on the matter, but he was aware that he had received an inspiration, and that somehow or other everything was now to be different. . . . First for that confounded speech. He strove to recollect the sentences which had followed each other so trippingly during his morning's walk. But he could not concentrate his mind. Peace treaties and German reparations and the recognition of Russia flitted from him like a rapid film, to be replaced by a 'close-up' of a girl's face. Besides, he wanted to sing, and when song flows to the lips consecutive thought is washed out of the brain.

In this happy and exalted mood, dedicate to great enterprises of love and service, Sir Archie entered the Crask smoking-room, to be brought heavily to earth by the sordid business of John Macnab.

Leithen was there, reading a volume of Sir Walter Scott with an air of divine detachment. Lamancha, very warm and dishevelled, was endeavouring to quench his thirst with a large whiskey-and-soda; Palliser-Yeates, also the worse for wear, lay in an attitude of extreme fatigue on a sofa; Crossby, who had sought sanctuary at Crask, was busy with the newspapers which had just arrived, while Wattie Lithgow stood leaning on his crook staring into vacancy, like a clown from some stage Arcadia.

'Where on earth have you been all day, Archie?' Lamancha asked sternly.

'I walked over to Glenraden and stayed to luncheon. They're all hot on your side there — Bandicott too. There's a general feelin' that young Claybody wants takin' down a peg.'

'Much good that will do us. John and Wattie and I have been crawling all day round the Haripol marches. It's pretty clear what they'll do — you think so, Wattie?'

'Alan Macnicol is not altogether a fule. Aye, I ken fine what they'll do.'

'Clear the beasts off the ground?' Archie suggested.

'No,' said Lamancha. 'Move them into the sanctuary, and the sanctuary is in the very heart of the forest — between Sgurr Mor and Sgurr Dearg at the head of the Reascuill. It won't take many men to watch it. And the mischief is that Haripol is the one forest where it can be done quite simply. It's so infernally rough that if the deer were all over it I would back myself to get a shot with a fair chance of removing the beast, but if every stag is inside an inner corral it will be the devil's own business to get within a thousand yards of them — let alone shift the carcase.'

'If the wind keeps in the west,' said Wattie, 'it is a manifest impossibeelity. If it was in the north there would be a verra wee sma' chance. All other airts are hopeless. We maun just possess our souls in patience, and see what the day brings forth. . . . I'll awa' and mak' arrangements for the morn.'

Lamancha nodded after the retreating figure.

'He is determined to go to Muirtown to-morrow. Says you promised that he should be present when you made your first bow in public, and that he has arranged with Shapp to drive him in the Ford. . . . But about Haripol.

This idea of Wattie's — and I expect it's right — makes the job look pretty desperate. I had worked out a very sound scheme to set my Lord Claybody guessing — similar to John's Glenraden plan, but more ingenious; but what's the use of bluff if every beast is snug in an upper corrie with a cordon of Claybody's men round it? Wattie says that Haripol is fairly crawling with gillies.'

Crossby raised his head from his journalistic researches. 'The papers have got my story all right, I see. The first one, I mean — the "Return of Harald Blacktooth." They've featured it well, too, and I expect the evening papers are now going large on it. But it's nothing to what the second will be to-morrow morning. I'm prepared to bet that our Scottish Tutankhamen drops out of the running, and that the press of this land thinks of nothing for a week except the salmon Sir Edward got last night. It's the silly season, remember!'

Lamancha's jaw dropped. 'Mr. Crossby, I don't want to dash your natural satisfaction, but I'm afraid you've put me finally in the cart. If the public wakes up and takes an interest in Haripol, I may as well chuck in my hand.'

'I wasn't such an ass as to mention Haripol,' said the correspondent.

'No, but of course it will get out. Some of your journalistic colleagues will hear of it at Strathlarrig, and, finding that the interest has departed from Harald Blacktooth, will make a bee-line for Haripol. Your success, which I don't grudge you, will be my ruin. In any case the Claybodys will be put on their mettle, for, if they are beaten by John Macnab, they know they'll be a public laughing-stock. . . . What sort of fellow is young Claybody, Archie?'

'Bit shaggy about the heels. Great admirer of yours. Ask Ned — he said he knew Ned very well.'

Leithen raised his eyes from 'Redgauntlet.' 'Never heard of the fellow in my life.'

'Oh, yes, you have. He said he had briefed you in a big case.'

'Well, you can't expect me to know all my clients any more than John knows the customers of his little bank.' Leithen relapsed into Sir Walter.

'I'm going to have a bath.' Lamancha rose and cautiously relaxed his weary limbs. 'I seem to be in for the most imbecile escapade in history with about one chance in a billion. That's Wattie's estimate, and he knows what a billion is, which I don't.'

'What about droppin' it?' Archie suggested, for, though he was sworn to the 'John Macnab proposition,' he was growing very nervous about this particular manifestation. 'Young Claybody is an ugly customer, and we don't want the thing to end in bad blood. Besides, you're cured already — you told me so yesterday.'

'That's true,' said Lamancha, who was engaged in tossing with Palliser-Yeates for the big bath. 'I'm cured. I never felt keener in my life. I'm so keen that there's nothing on earth you could offer me which would keep me away from Haripol. . . . You win, John. Gentleman of the Guard, fire first, and don't be long about it. I can't stretch myself in that drain-pipe that Archie calls his second bathroom.'

Dinner was a cheerful meal, for Mr. Crossby had much to say. Lamancha was in high spirits, and Leithen had the benignity of the successful warrior. But the host was silent and abstracted. He managed to ban-

ish Haripol from his mind, but he thought of Janet, he thought of Janet's sermon, and in feverish intervals he tried to think of his speech for the morrow. A sense of a vast insecurity had come upon him, of a shining goal which grew brighter the more he reflected upon it, but of some awkward hurdles to get over first.

Afterwards, when the talk was of Haripol, he turned to the newspapers to restore him to the world of stern realities. He did not read that masterpiece of journalism, Crossby's story, but he found a sober comfort in the 'Times,' leading articles and in the political notes. He felt himself a worker among *flâneurs*.

'Here's something about you, Charles,' he said. 'This paper says that political circles are lookin' forward with great interest to your speech at Muirtown. Says it will be the first important utterance since Parliament rose, and that you are expected to deal with Poincaré's speech at Rheims and a letter by a Boche whose name I can't pronounce.'

'Political circles will be disappointed,' said Lamancha, 'for I haven't read them. Montgomery is taking all the boxes and I haven't heard from the Office for three weeks. I can't be troubled with newspapers in the Highlands.'

'Then what are you goin' to say to-morrow?' Archie demanded anxiously.

'I'll think of some rot. Don't worry, old fellow. Muirtown is a second-class show compared to Haripol.'

Archie was really shocked. He was envious of a man who could treat thus cavalierly a task which affected him with horrid forebodings and also scandalised at the levity of his leaders. It seemed to him that Lamancha needed some challenging. Finding no comfort in his com-

pany, he repaired to bed, where healthful sleep was slow in visiting him. He repeated his speech to himself, but it would persist in getting tangled up with Janet's sermon and his own subsequent reflections, so that, when at last he dropped off, it was into a world of ridiculous dreams, where a dreadful composite figure — Poincarini or Mus-solinaré — sat heavily on his chest.

CHAPTER IX

SIR ARCHIE INSTRUCTS HIS COUNTRYMEN

CROSSBY was right in his forecast. The sudden interest in the Scottish Tutankhamen did not survive the revelation of Harald Blacktooth's reincarnation as John Macnab. The twenty correspondents, after lunching heavily with Mr. Bandicott, had been shown the relics of the Viking and had heard their significance expounded by their host and Professor Babwater; each had duly despatched his story, but before nightfall each was receiving urgent telegrams from his paper clamouring for news, not of Harald, but of Harald's successor. Crossby's tale of the frustrated attempt on the Glenraden deer had intrigued several million readers — it was the silly season, remember — and his hint of the impending raid on the Strathlarrig salmon had stirred a popular interest vowed to any lawless mystery and any competitive sport. In the doings of John Macnab were blended the splendid uncertainty of a well-matched prize-fight and the delicious obscurity of crime. Next morning the news of John's victory at Strathlarrig was received by the several million readers with an enthusiasm denied to the greater matters of public conduct. John Macnab became a slogan for the newsboy, a flaming legend for bills and headlines, a subject of delighted talk at every breakfast-table. Never had there been a more famous eight-pound salmon since fish first swam in the sea.

It was a cold grey morning when Lamancha and Archie left Crask in the Hispana, bound for the station of Bridge

of Gair, fifty miles distant by indifferent hill-roads. Lamancha, who had telegraphed for clothes, was magnificently respectable below his heavy ulster — a respectability which was not his usual habit but a concession to the urgent demand for camouflage. He was also in a bad temper, for his legs were still abominably stiff, and, though in need of at least ten hours' sleep, he had been allowed precisely six. At long last, too, his speech had begun to weigh upon him. 'Shut up, Archie,' he had told his host. 'I must collect what's left of my wits, or I'll make an exhibition of myself. You say we get the morning's papers at Bridge of Gair? They may give me a point or two. Lord, it's like one of those beastly mornings in Switzerland when they rake you up at two to climb Mont Blanc and you wish you had never been born.'

Sir Archie had no inclination to garrulity, for black fear had settled on his soul. In a few hours' time he would be doing what he had never done before, standing before a gaping audience which was there to be amused and possibly instructed. He had a speech in his pocket, carefully fashioned in consultation with Lamancha, but he was miserably conscious that it had no relation to his native wood-notes. What was Poincaré to him, or he to Poincaré? Why on earth had he not chosen to speak about something which touched his interests — farming, for example, on which he held views, or the future of the Air Force — instead of venturing into the unknown deserts of foreign affairs? Well, he had burned his boats and must make the best of it. The great thing was to be sure that the confounded speech had been transferred from paper to his memory.

But as the miles slipped behind him he realised with

horror that his memory was playing him false. He could not get the bits to fit in; what he had reeled off so smoothly twenty-four hours ago now came out in idiotic shreds and patches. He felt himself slipping into a worse funk than he had ever known in all his tempestuous days. . . . For a moment he thought of throwing up the sponge. He might engineer a breakdown — it would have to be a bad spill, for the day was yet young — and so depriving Muirtown of the presence of both Lamancha and himself. It was not the thought of the Conservative cause or his own political chances that made him reject this cowardly expedient. Two reasons dissuaded him: one, that though his friends continually prophesied disaster, he had never yet had a smash with his car, and his pride was involved; the other, that such a course would reveal Lamancha's presence in his company too near the suspect neighbourhood and might expose the secret of John Macnab. . . . No, he had to go through with it, and, conning such wretched fragments of his oratory as he could dig out of his recollection, Sir Archie drove the Hispana over the bleak moorlands till he was looking down in the wide strath of the Gair, with the railway line scarring the heather and the hotel chimneys smoking beside a cold blue-grey river. He had glanced now and then at his fellow orator, whose professional apathy he profoundly envied, since for the last dozen miles Lamancha had been peacefully asleep.

They breakfasted at the hotel, and presently sought the station platform in the quest for papers. They were informed that papers came with the train for which they were waiting, and when the said train arrived, half an hour late, and Lamancha according to arrangement,

had sought a seat in the front while Archie favoured the rear, the latter secured a London evening paper of the previous day and that morning's 'Scotsman.' The compartment in which he found himself was crowded with sleepy and short-tempered people who had made the night journey from the south. So on a pile of three gun-cases in the corridor Archie sat himself and gave his attention to the enlightened Press of his country.

He rubbed his eyes to make certain that he was not dreaming. For there, in conspicuous print on a prominent page of a respected newspaper, was the name of John Macnab. There was other news: of outrages in Mexico and earthquakes in the Pacific, of the disappearance of a solicitor and the arrival in London of a cinema star, but all seemed dwarfed and paled by Crossby's story. There was news of Harald Blacktooth, too, and authentic descriptions of the treasure-trove, but this was in an unconsidered corner. Cheek by jowl with the leading article was what clearly most interested the editor out of all the events on the surface of the globe — the renaissance of Harald Blacktooth phoenix-like from his ashes, and the capture of the Strathlarrig salmon.

Archie read the thing confusedly without taking much of it in. Then he turned to the London evening paper. It was a journal which never objected to breaking up its front page for spicy news, and there on the front page was a summary of the Strathlarrig exploit. Moreover, there was a short, hastily compiled article on the subject and a number of stimulating notes. John Macnab was becoming a household name, and the gaze of Britain was being centred on his shy personality . . . The third act in the drama would be played under bright light to a full

gallery... Archie's eyes caught the end of the first 'Scotsman' leader, which contained a reference to the Muirtown meeting, and a speculation as to what the Secretary of State for the Dominions would say. Archie, too, speculated as to what Lamancha was saying at that moment at the other end of the train.

This new complexity did something to quiet his nerves and take his mind off his approaching ordeal. There was no word in the papers of the coming raid on Haripol — Crossby had had that much sense — but, of course, whatever happened at Haripol would be broadcast through the land. The Claybodys, if they defeated John Macnab, would be famous; ridiculous, if they were beaten; and, while the latter fate might be taken with good humour by the Bandicotts, it would be gall and wormwood to a young gentleman with strong notions on the rights and dignities of landed property. It was mathematically certain that Johnson Claybody, as soon as he saw the newspapers, would devote all the powers of a not insignificant mind and the energies of a stubborn temper to the defence of Haripol. That was bad enough, but the correspondents at Strathlarrig were likely to have heard by this time of the third of John Macnab's wagers, and the attempt might have to be made under their argus-eyed espionage. Altogether, things were beginning to look rather dark for John, and incidentally for Sir Archie.

These morose reflections occupied him till the train stopped at Frew, the ticket-station for Muirtown. Here, according to plan, Sir Archie descended, for he could not arrive at the terminus in Lamancha's company. There was a cold gusty wind from the northwest which promised rain, the sky was overcast, and the sea, half a mile distant

across the sand-dunes, was grey and sullen. Sir Archie, having two hours to fill before the official luncheon, resolved to reject the ancient station fly and walk. . . . Once again the shadow of his speech descended on him. He limped along the shore road, trying to see the words as he had written them down, trying especially to get the initial sentence clear for each paragraph, for he believed that if he remembered these the rest would follow. The thing went rather better now. Parts came in a cascade of glibness, and he remembered Lamancha's injunction not to be too dapper or too rapid. The peroration was all right, and so was the exordium; only one passage near the middle seemed to offer a snag. He devoted the rest of his walk exclusively to this passage, till he was assured that he had it by heart.

He reached Muirtown within an hour, and decided to kill time by visiting some of his friends among the shopkeepers. The gun-maker welcomed him cordially, and announced his intention of coming to hear him that afternoon. But politics had clearly been ousted from that worthy's head by the newspaper which lay on his counter.

'What about this John Macnab, Sir Archibald?' he asked.

'What about him? I'm hanged if I know what to think.'

'If Mr. Tarras wasn't deid in Africa I would ken fine what to think. The man will likely be a gentleman, and he must be a grand fisher. I ken that bit o' the Larrig, and to get a salmon in it wants a fair demon at the job. Crask is no three miles away. D'ye hear nothing at Crask?'

It was the same wherever he went. The fishmonger

pointed to a fish on his slabs, and observed that it would be about the size of the one taken at Strathlarrig. The bookseller, who knew his customer's simple tastes in letters, regretted that no contemporary novel of his acquaintance promised such entertainment as the drama now being enacted in Wester Ross. Tired of needless lying, Sir Archie forsook the shops and went for a stroll beside the harbour. But even there John Macnab seemed to pursue him. Wherever he saw a man with a paper he knew what he was reading, the people at the street corners were no doubt discussing the same subject — nay, he was sure he heard the very words spoken as he passed. . . . The sight of a blue poster with his name in large letters reminded him of his duties and he turned his steps towards the Northern Club.

He was greeted by his host, a baillie of the town (the Provost belonged to the enemy camp) and was presented to the other guests. 'This is our candidate for Wester Ross, my lord,' and Archie was introduced to Lamancha, who smiled urbanely and remarked that he had had the pleasure of meeting Sir Archibald Roylance before. The Duke of Angus would not arrive till the hour of meeting, but Colonel Wavertree was there, a dapper red-faced gentleman who had an interest in breweries, and Mr. Murdoch of New Caledonia — immense, grizzled, and bearded, who had left the Lews as a child of three for the climes which had given him fortune. Also there was Lord Claybody, who came forward at once to renew his acquaintance.

'Very glad to see you, Sir Archibald. This is your first big meeting, isn't it? Good luck to you. A straightforward declaration of principles is what we want from our

future member, and I've no doubt we'll get it from you. Johnson sent his humblest apologies. He drove me in this morning, but unfortunately a troublesome bit of business took him back at once.'

Sir Archie thought he knew what that business was. He had always rather liked old Claybody, and now that he had leisure to study him the liking was confirmed. There was much of the son's arrogance about the eyes and mouth, but there was humour, too, which was lacking in Johnson, and his voice had a pleasant Midland burr. But he looked horribly competent and wide-awake. One would, thought Sir Archie, if one had made a great fortune one's self, and he concluded that the owner of Haripol was probably a bad man to get up against.

At luncheon they should have talked of the state of the nation and the future of their party; instead they talked of John Macnab. It was to be noted that Lord Claybody did not contribute much to the talk; he pursed his lips when the name was mentioned, and he did not reveal the challenge to Haripol. Patently he shared his son's views on the matter. But the others made no secret of their interest. Colonel Wavertree, who had come in from a neighbouring grouse-moor, was positive that the ruffian's escapades were not over. 'He'll go round the lot of us,' he said, 'and though it costs him fifty pounds a time, I dare say he gets his money's worth. I believe he is paid by the agents to put up the price of Highland places, for if he keeps on it will mean money in the pocket of every sporting tenant, besides the devil of a lot of fun.' Mr. Murdoch said it reminded him of the doings of one Pink Jones in New Caledonia forty years ago, and told a long and pointless tale of that hero. As for Lamancha, he re-

quested to be given the whole story, and made very good show of merriment. 'A parcel of undergraduates, I suppose,' he said.

But the Baillie, who gave him the information, was a serious man and disapproved. 'It will get the countryside a bad name, my lord. It is a challenge to law and order. There's too many Bolsheviks about as it is, without this John Macnab aidin' and abettin' them.'

'Most likely the fellow is a sound Tory,' said Laman-cha; but the Baillie ventured respectfully to differ.

'If your lordship will forgive me, there's some things too serious for jokin',' he concluded sententiously.

It was a dull luncheon, but to Archie the hours passed like fevered seconds. Agoraphobia had seized him once more, and he felt his tongue dry and his stomach hollow with trepidation. Food did not permit itself to be swallowed, so he contented himself with drinking two whiskey-and-sodas. Towards the close of the meal that wild form of valour which we call desperation was growing in him. He could do nothing more about his infernal speech, and must fling himself on fortune.

As they left the table the Baillie claimed him. 'Your agent is here, Sir Archibald. He wanted a word with you before the meeting.'

A lean, red-haired man awaited them in the hall. 'Hullo, Mr. Brodie. How are you? Glad to see you. Well, what's the drill for this afternoon?'

'It's that I was wantin' to see you about, sir. The arrangement was that you should speak first, then Lord Lamancha, then Colonel Wavertree, and Mr. Murdoch to finish off. But Baillie Dorrit thinks Lord Lamancha

should open, him bein' a Cabinet Minister, and that you should follow.'

'Right-o, Brodie! I'm game for anything you like. I've been a slack candidate up to now, and I don't profess to know the job like you.' Sir Archie spoke with a jauntiness which made his heart sick, but the agent was impressed.

'Fine, sir. I can see you're in grand fettle. Ye'll have a remarkable audience. There's been a demand for tickets far beyond the capacity o' the hall, and I hear of folk comin' from fifty mile round.'

Every word was like a knell to the wretched Archie, but with his spirits in the depths his manner took on a ghastly exhilaration. He lit a cigar with shaking fingers, patted Brodie on the back, linked his arm with the Bailie's, and in the short walk to the hall chatted like a magpie. So fevered was his behaviour that, as they entered the building by a side door, Lamancha whispered in his ear, 'Steady, old man. For God's sake, keep your head,' and Archie turned on him a face like a lost soul's.

'I'm goin' over the top,' he said.

The Town Hall of Muirtown, having been built originally for the purpose of a drill hall, was capable of holding inside its bare walls the better part of two thousand people. This afternoon it was packed to the door, presumably with voters, for the attendants had ruthlessly turned away all juvenile politicians. As Sir Archie took his seat on the platform, while a selection from the Muirtown Brass Band rendered 'Annie Laurie,' he seemed to be looking down as from an aeroplane on a strange, unfeatured country. The faces might have been tombstones for all the personality they represented. Some of

his friends were there, no doubt, but he could no more have recognised them than he could have picked out the starling which haunted the Crask lawn from a flock seen next day on the hill. The place swam in a mist, like a corrie viewed in the morning from the hill-tops, and he knew that the mist came out of his own quaking soul. He had heard of stage-fright, but had never dreamed that it could be such a blackness of darkness.

The Duke of Angus was very old, highly respected, and almost wholly witless. He had never been very clever — Disraeli, it was said, had refused him the Thistle on the ground that he would eat it — and of late years his mind had retired into a happy vacuity. As a chairman he was mercifully brief. He told a Scots story, at which he shook with laughter but the point of which he unfortunately left out; he repeated very loudly the names of the speakers — Sir Archie started at the sound of his own like a scared fawn; in a tone which was almost a bellow he uttered the words 'Lord Lamancha' and then he sat down.

Lamancha had the reception which is always accorded to a man whose name is often in the newspapers. Most of the audience had never seen him in the flesh, and human nature is grateful for satisfied curiosity. Presently he had them docile under the spell of his charming voice. He never attempted oratory in the grand style, but he possessed all the lesser accomplishments. He had nothing new to say, but he said the old things with a pleasant sincerity and that simplicity which is the result only of a long-practised art. It was the kind of speech of which he had made hundreds and would make hundreds more; there was nothing in it to lay hold of, but it produced an impression of being at once weighty and spontaneous,

flattering to the audience and a proof of the speaker's easy mastery of his trade. There was a compliment to the Duke, a warm tribute to Sir Archie, a bantering profession of shyness on the part of a Borderer speaking north of the Forth. Then, by an easy transition, he passed to Highland problems — the land, emigration, the ex-service men — and thence to the prime economic needs of Britain since 1918, the relation of these needs to world demands, the necessity of meeting them by using the full assets of an Empire which had been a unit in war and should be a unit in peace. There was little to inspire, but little to question; platitudes were so artfully linked together as to give the impression of a rounded and stable creed. Here was one who spoke seriously, responsibly, and yet with optimism; there was character here, said the ordinary man, and yet obviously a mind as well. Even the stern critics on the back benches had no fault to find with a statement from which they could only dissent with respect. None recognised that it was the manner that bewitched them. Lamancha, who on occasion could be profound, was now only improving. The matter was a mosaic of bits of old speeches and answers to deputations, which he put together cynically with his left hand. But the manner was superb — the perfect production of a fine voice, the cunning emphasis, the sudden halts, the rounded cadences, the calculated hesitations. He sat down after forty minutes amid a tempest of that applause which is the tribute to professional skill and has nothing to do with conviction.

Sir Archie had listened with awe. Knowing now from bitter experience the thorny path of oratory, he was dumbfounded by this spectacle of a perfection of which

he had never dreamed. What a fiasco would his halting utterance be in such company! He glanced at the notes in his hand, but could not read them; he strove to remember his opening sentences, and discovered them elusive. Then suddenly he heard his name spoken, and found himself on his feet.

He was scarcely aware of the applause with which he was greeted. All he knew was that every word of his speech had fled from his memory and would never return. The faces below him were a horrid white blur at which he knew he was foolishly grinning. . . . In his pocket was an oration carefully written out. If he were to pluck it forth, and try to read it, he knew that he could not make sense of a word, for his eyes had lost the power of sight. . . . Profound inertia seized him; he must do something, but there was a dreadful temptation to do nothing, just to go on grinning, like a man in a nightmare who finds himself in the track of an express train.

Nevertheless, such automata are we, he was speaking. He did not know what he was saying, but as a matter of fact he was repeating the words with which the chairman had introduced him. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we are fortunate in the privilege of having heard so stirring and statesmanlike an address as that which His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Dominions has just delivered. Now we are to hear what our gallant and enterprising friend, the prospective candidate for Wester Ross, has to say to us about the problems which confront the nation.'

He repeated this exordium like a parrot. The audience scented a mild joke, and laughed. . . . Then in a twittering falsetto he repeated it again, this time in silence. There was a vague sense that something had gone wrong. He

was about to repeat it a third time, and then the crash would have come, and he would have retired gibbering from the field.

The situation was saved by Wattie Lithgow. Seated at the back of the hall, Wattie saw that his master was in deadly peril, and took the only way to save him. He had a voice of immense compass and he used it to the full.

‘Speak up, man,’ he roared, ‘I canna hear a word ye’re sayin’.’

There were shouts of ‘Order,’ and the stewards glared angrily at Wattie, but the trick had been done. Sir Archie’s eyes opened and he saw the audience no longer like turnips in a field, but as living and probably friendly human beings. Above all he saw Wattie’s gnarled face and anxious eyes. Suddenly his brain cleared, and, had he desired it, he could have reeled off the speech in his pocket as glibly as he had repeated it in the solitudes of Crask. But he felt that that was no longer possible. The situation required a different kind of speech, and he believed he could make it. He would speak direct to Wattie, as he had often lectured him in the Crask smoking-room.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ he said, and his voice had become full and confident. ‘Your “gallant and enterprising friend” is not much of a hand at public speaking. I have still my job to learn, and with your help I hope soon to learn it. What I have to say to you this afternoon is the outcome of my first amateurish study of public questions. You may take it that my views are honest and my own. I am not a gramophone.’

In this last sentence he lied, for what he said was for the most part not his own; it was the sermon which Janet

Raden had preached him the day before in the clear air of the Carnmore tops. Mixed up with it were fragments of old discourses of his own to Wattie, and reflections which had come to him in the last ten years of a variegated life. The manner was staccato, the style was slangy and inelegant, but it was not a lesson learned and recited, but words spoken direct to those into whose eyes he was looking. He had found touch with his audience, and he held their attention in a vice.

It was a strange, inconsequent speech, but it had a curious appeal in it — the appeal of youth and candour and courage. It was philosophy rather than politics, a ragged but arresting philosophy. He began by confessing that the War had left the world in a muddle, a muddle which affected his own mind. The only cure was to be honest with one's self, and to refuse to accept specious nonsense and conventional jargon. He told the story from Andersen of the Emperor's New Suit. 'Our opponents call us Tories,' he said; 'they can call us anything they jolly well please. I am proud to be called a Tory. I understand that the name was first given by Titus Oates to those who disbelieved in his Popish Plot. What we want to-day is Toryism — the courage to give the lie to impudent rogues.'

That was a memory of Leithen's table-talk. The rest was all from Janet Raden. He preached the doctrine of Challenge; of no privilege without responsibility, of only one right of man — the right to do his duty, of all power and property held on sufferance. These were the thoughts which had been growing in his head since yesterday afternoon. He spoke of the changing face of the land — the Highlands ceasing to be the home of men and becoming

the mere raw material of picture post-cards, the old gentry elbowed out and retiring with a few trinkets and pictures and the war medals of their dead to suburban lodgings. It all came of not meeting the Challenge. . . . What was Bolshevism but a challenge, perhaps a much-needed challenge, to make certain of the faith that was in a man? He had no patience with the timorous and whining rich. No law could protect them unless they made themselves worth protecting. As a Tory, he believed that the old buildings were still sound, but they must be swept and garnished, that the ancient weapons were the best, but they must be kept bright and shining and ready for use. So soon as a cause feared enquiry and the light of day, that cause was doomed. The ostrich, hiding its head in the sand, left its rump a fatal temptation to the boot of the passer-by.

Sir Archie was not always clear, he was often ungrammatical, and he nobly mixed his metaphors, but he held his audience tight. He did more, when at the close of his speech he put his case in the form of an apologue — the apologue of John Macnab. The mention of the name brought laughter and loud cheering. John Macnab, he said, was abroad in the world to-day, like a catfish among a shoal of herrings. He had his defects, no doubt, but he was badly wanted, for he was at bottom a sportsman and his challenge had to be met. Even if the game went against them the challenged did not wholly lose, for they were stirred out of inaction into life.

No queerer speech was ever made by a candidate on his first public appearance. It had no kind of success with the Baillie, nor, it may be presumed, with Lord Claybody; indeed, I doubt if any of the distinguished

folk on the platform quite approved of it, except Laman-cha. But there was no question of its appeal to the audience, and the applause which had followed Laman-cha's peroration was as nothing to that amid which Sir Archie resumed his seat.

At the back of the hall a wild-eyed man sitting near Wattie Lithgow had been vociferous in his plaudits. 'He ca's himsel' a Tory. By God, it's the red flag that he'll be wavin' soon.'

'If you say that again,' said Wattie fiercely, 'I'll smash your heid.'

'Keep your hair on,' was the reply. 'I'm for the young ane, whatever he ca's himsel'.'

Archie sat down with his brain in a whirl, for he had tasted the most delirious of joys — the sense of having moved a multitude. He had never felt happier in his life — or, let it be added, more truly amazed. A fiery trial was over, and brilliantly over. He had spoken straightforwardly to his fellow mortals with ease and acceptance. The faces below him were no longer featureless, but human and friendly and interesting. He did not listen closely to Colonel Wavertree's remarks, which seemed to be mostly about taxation, or to the ex-Premier of New Caledonia, who was heavily rhetorical and passionately imperial. Modest as he was, he had a pleased consciousness that, though he might have talked a good deal of rot, he had gripped his hearers as not even Laman-cha had gripped them. He searched through the hall for faces to recognise. Wattie, he saw, savagely content; the Colonel, too, who looked flushed and happy, and Junius, and Agatha. But there was no sign of Janet, and his failure to find her threw a dash of cold water on his triumph.

The next step was to compass an inconspicuous departure. Lamancha would be escorted in state to the four-forty-five train, and he must join it at Frew. While 'God save the King' was being sung, Sir Archie escaped by a side door, followed by an excited agent.

'Man, ye went down tremendous,' Brodie gasped. 'Ye changed your mind — ye told me ye were goin' to deal wi' foreign policy. Anyway, you've started fine, and there'll be no gettin' inside the hall the next time ye speak in Muirtown.'

Archie shook him off, picked up a taxi-cab at the station, and drove to Frew. There, after lurking in the waiting-room, he duly entered a third-class carriage in the rear of the south-going train. At six o'clock he emerged on to the platform at Bridge of Gair, and waited till the train had gone before he followed Lamancha to the hotel. He found his friend thinking only of Haripol.

'I had a difficult job to get rid of Claybody, and had to tell a lot of lies. Said I was going to stay with Lanerick and that my man had gone on there with my luggage. We'd better be off, for we've a big day before us to-morrow.'

But, as the Hispana started up the road to the pass, Lamancha smiled affectionately on the driver and patted his shoulder. 'I've often called you an idiot, Archie, but I'm bound to say to-day you were an inspired idiot. You may win this seat or not — it doesn't matter — but sooner or later you're going to make a howling success in that silly game.'

Beyond the pass the skies darkened for rain, and it was in a deluge that the car, a little after eight o'clock, crossed

the Bridge of Larrig. Archie had intended to go round by one of the peat-roads, but the wild weather had driven every one to shelter, and it seemed safe to take the straight road up the hill. Shapp, who had just arrived in the Ford, took charge of the car, and Archie and Laman-cha sprinted through the drizzle to the back door.

To their surprise it was locked, and when, in reply to their hammering, Mrs. Lithgow appeared, it was only after repeated questions through the scullery-window that she was convinced of their identity and permitted them to enter.

‘We’ve been sair fashed wi’ folk,’ was her laconic comment, as she retired hastily to the kitchen after locking the door behind them.

In the smoking-room they found the lamps lit, the windows shuttered, Crossby busy with the newspapers, Palliser-Yeates playing patience, and Leithen as usual deep in the works of Sir Walter Scott.

‘Well,’ was the unanimous question, ‘how did it go off?’

‘Not so bad,’ said Archie. ‘Charles was in great form. But what on earth has scared Mrs. Lithgow?’

Leithen laid down his book. ‘We’ve had the devil of a time. Our base has been attacked. It looks as if we may have a rear-guard action to add to our troubles. We’re practically besieged. Two hours ago I was all for burning our ciphers and retiring.’

‘Besieged? By whom?’

‘By the correspondents. Ever since the early afternoon. I fancy their editors have been prodding them with telegrams. Anyhow, they’ve forgotten all about Harald Blacktooth and are hot on the scent of John Macnab.’

‘But what brought them here?’

'Method of elimination, I suppose. Your journalist is a sharp fellow. They argued that John Macnab must have a base near by, and as it wasn't Strathlarrig or Glenraden, it was most likely here. Also they caught sight of Crossby taking the air, and gave chase. Crossby flung them off — happily they can't have recognised him — but they had him treed in the stable loft for three hours.'

'Did they see you?'

'No. Some got into the hall and some glued their faces to this window, but John was under the table and I was making myself very small at the back of the sofa. . . . Mrs. Lithgow handled them like Napoleon. Said the laird was away and wouldn't be back till midnight, but he'd see them at ten o'clock to-morrow. She had to promise that, for they are determined ruffians. They'd probably still be hanging about the place if it hadn't been for this blessed rain.'

'That's not all,' put in Palliser-Yeates. 'We had a visit from a lunatic. We didn't see him, for Mrs. Lithgow lured him indoors and has him shut up in the wine-cellar.'

'Good God! What kind of lunatic?' Sir Archie exclaimed.

'Don't know. Mrs. Lithgow was not communicative. She said something about smallpox. Maybe he's a fellow sufferer looking for Archie's company. Anyhow, he's in the wine-cellar for Wattie to deal with.'

Sir Archie rose and marched from the room, and did not return till the party was seated at a late supper. His air was harassed and his eyes were wild.

'It wasn't the wine-cellar,' he groaned, 'it was the coal-hole. He's upstairs now having a bath and changing into a suit of my clothes. Pretty short in the temper, too, and

no wonder. For Heaven's sake, you fellows, stroke him down when he appears. We've got to bank on his being a good chap and tell him everything. It's deuced hard luck. Here am I just makin' a promisin' start in my public career, and you've gone and locked up the local Medical Officer of Health who came to enquire into a reputed case of smallpox.'

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH CRIME — ADDED TO CRIME

By the mercy of Providence, Dr. Kello fulfilled Archie's definition of a 'good chap.' He was a sandy-haired young man from Dundee, who had been in the Air Force, and on his native dialect had grafted the intricate slang of that service. Archie had found him half-choked with coal-dust and wrath, and abject apologies had scarcely mollified him. But a hot bath and his host's insistence that he should spend the night at Crask — Dr. Kello knew very well that at the inn he would get no more than a sofa — had worked a miracle, and he appeared at the supper-table prepared to forgive and forget. He was a little awed by the company in which he found himself, and nervously murmured, 'Pleased to meet ye' in response to the various introductions. A good meal and Archie's *Veuve Clicquot* put him into humour with himself and at ease with his surroundings. He exchanged War reminiscences, and told stories of his professional life — 'You wouldn't believe, I tell ye, what queer folk the Highlanders are' — and when, later in the evening, Archie, speaking as to a brother airman, made a clean breast of the John Macnab affair, he received the confession with obstreperous hilarity. 'It's the best stunt I ever heard tell of,' he roared, slapping his knee. 'You may depend on me to back ye up, too. Is it the journalists that's worrying ye? You leave the merchants to me. I'll shut their mouths for them. Ten o'clock to-morrow, is it? Well, I'll be there with a face as long as my arm,

and I'll guarantee to send them down the hill like a kirk emptying.'

All night it rained in bucketfuls, and the Friday morning broke with the same pitiless deluge. Lamancha came down to breakfast in a suit of clothes which would have been refused by a self-respecting tramp, but which, as a matter of fact, had been his stalking outfit for a dozen years. The Merklands were not a dressy family. He studied the barograph, where the needle was moving ominously downward, and considered the dissolving skies and the mist which rose like a wall beyond the terrace.

'It's no good,' he told his host. 'You might as well try to stalk Haripol in a snow blizzard. To-day must be washed out, and that leaves us only to-morrow. We'll have to roost indoors, and we're terribly at the mercy of that hive of correspondents.'

The hive came at ten, a waterproofed army defying the weather in the cause of duty. But in front of the door they were met by Dr. Kello, with a portentous face.

'Good-morning, boys,' he said. 'Sir Archibald Roylance asked me to see ye on his behalf. My name's Kello — I'm Medical Officer of Health for this part of the world. I'm very sorry, but ye can't see Sir Archibald this morning. In fact, I want ye to go away and not come near the place at all.'

He was promptly asked for his reason.

'The fact is that a suspected case of smallpox has been reported from Crask. That's why I'm here. I say "suspected," for, in my own opinion, it's nothing of the kind. But I'm bound to take every precaution, and, for your own sakes, I can't let a man jack of ye a step nearer.'

The news was received in silence, and added to the depression of the dripping weather. A question was asked.

'No, it's not Sir Archibald. He's as disappointed as you are at not being able to welcome ye. He says if ye come back in forty-eight hours — that's the time when I hope to give the place a clean bill of health — he would like to stand ye drinks and have a crack with ye.'

Five minutes later the doctor returned to the smoking-room. 'They're off like good laddies, and I don't think they'll trouble ye for the next two days. Gosh! They're as feared of infectious diseases as a Highlander. I'll give them a wee while to go down the hill, and then I'll start off home on my motor-bike. I'm very much obliged to you gentlemen for your good entertainment. . . . Ye may be sure I'll hold my tongue about the confidence ye've honoured me with. Not a cheep from me! But I can tell ye, I'll be keeping my ears open for word of John Macnab. Good luck to ye, gentlemen!'

The departure of Dr. Kello was followed by the appearance of Wattie Lithgow, accompanied by Benjie, whose water-proof cape of ceremony had now its uses.

'I've got bad news from this laddie,' said the former, lugging Benjie forward by the ear. 'He was at Haripol early this morn'ing and a' the folk there was speakin' about it. Macnicol tell't him —'

'No, he didna,' put in Benjie. 'Macnicol's ower prood to speak to me. I heard it frae the men in the bothy and frae ane o' the lassies up at the big hoose.'

'Weel, what a'boddy kens is maistly true. Ye'll no guess what yon auld Claybody is daein'. Ye ken he's a contractor, forbye ither things, and he's got the contrack for makin' the big dam at Kinlochbuie. There's maybe

a thousand navvies workin' there, and he's bringing ower a squad o' them — Benjie says mair nor a hundred — to guaird the forest.'

'Ass!' exclaimed Palliser-Yeates. 'He'll drive every beast into Caithness.'

'Na, na. Macnicol is no entirely wantin' in sense. The navvies will no be allowed inside the forest. They'll be a guaird outside — what's that ye ca' it? — an outer barrage. Macnicol will see that a' the deer are in the sanctuary, and in this kind o' weather it will no be that deeficult. But it will be verra deeficult for his lordship to get inside the forest, and it will be verra near an impossibility to get a beast out.'

Archie looked round the room. 'Dashed unsportin' I call it. I bet it's the young 'un's idea.'

'Look here, Charles,' said Leithen. 'Isn't it about time to consider whether you shouldn't cry off this Haripol affair? It was different at the start. John and I had a fair sporting chance. Our jobs were steep enough, but yours is absolutely perpendicular. . . . The Claybodys are not taking any chances, and a hundred able-bodied navvies is a different-sized proposition to a few gillies. The confounded press has blazoned the thing so wide that if you're caught you'll be a laughing-stock to the whole civilised world. Don't you see that you simply can't afford to lose, any more than the Claybodys? Then, to put the lid on it, our base is under a perpetual threat from those newspaper fellows. I'd rather have all Scotland Yard after me than the press — you agree, Crossby? I'm inclined to think that John Macnab has done enough *pour chauffer la gloire*. It's insanity to go on.'

Lamanca shook his head. 'It's all very well for you

— you won. I tell you frankly that nothing on earth will prevent me having a try at Haripol. All you say is perfectly true, but I don't choose to listen to it. This news of Wattie's only makes me more determined.'

Leithen subsided into his book, observing: 'I suppose that is because you're a great man. You're a sober enough fellow at most times, but you're able now and then to fling your hat over the moon. You can damn the consequences, which I suppose is one of the tests of greatness. John and I can't, but we admire you, and we'll bail you out.'

It was Sir Archie, strangely enough, who now abetted Lamancha's obstinacy. 'I grant you the odds are stiff,' he declared, 'but that only means that we must find some way to shorten them. Nothing's impossible after yesterday. There was I gibbering with terror and not a notion in my head, and yet I got on fairly well, didn't I, Wattie?'

'Ye made a grand speech, Sir. There was some said it was the best speech they ever heard in a' their days. There was one man said ye was haverin', but' — fiercely — 'he didna say it twice.'

'We've the whole day to make a plan,' Archie went on. 'Hang it all, there must be some way to diddle the Claybodys. We've got a pretty good notion of the lie of the land, and Wattie's a perfect Red Indian at getting up to deer. We muster four and a half able-bodied men, counting me as half. And there's Benjie. Benjie, you're a demon at strategy. Have you anything to say?'

'Aye,' said Benjie, 'I've a plan. But ye're ower particular here, and maybe ye wadna like it.' This with a dark glance at Palliser-Yeates who was leaving the room to get more tobacco.

‘We’ll have it all the same. Let’s sit down to business. Stick the Ordnance map on that table, Charles, and you, Ned, shut that book and give us the benefit of your powerful mind.’

Leithen rose, yawning. ‘I’ve left my pipe in the dining-room. Wait a moment till I fetch it.’

Now Dr. Kello, on his departure, had left the front door of the house open, and the steady downpour of rain blanketed all other sounds from outside. So it came to pass that when Archie’s quick ear caught the noise of footsteps on the gravel and he bounded into the hall he was confronted with the spectacle of Colonel Raden and his daughters already across the doorstep. Moreover, as luck would have it, at the same moment Leithen from the dining-room and Palliser-Yeates from his bedroom converged on the same point.

‘Hullo, Roylance,’ the Colonel cried. ‘This is a heathenish hour for a visit, but we had to have some exercise, and my daughters wanted to come up and congratulate you on your performance yesterday. A magnificent speech, sir! Uncommon good sense! What I —’

But the Colonel stopped short in mystification at the behaviour of his daughters, who were staring with wide eyes at two unknown figures who stood shamefacedly behind Sir Archie. This last, having no alternative, was trying to carry off things with a high hand.

‘Let me introduce,’ he was proclaiming, ‘Sir Edward Leithen — Mr. Palliser-Yeates — Miss Raden, Miss Janet Raden, Colonel —’

But he was unheeded. Agatha was looking at Leithen and Janet at Palliser-Yeates, and simultaneously the two ejaculated, ‘John Macnab!’

Archie saw that it was all up. Shouting for Mrs. Lithgow, he helped his visitors to get out of their mackintoshes, and ordered his housekeeper to have these garments dried. Then he ushered them into the smoking-room, where were Lamancha and Crossby and Benjie and a good peat-fire. Wattie, at the first sound of voices, had discreetly retired.

‘Come along, Colonel, and I’ll explain. Very glad to see you — have that pew . . . what about dry stockings? . . .’

But his hospitable bustle was unheeded. The Colonel, hopelessly at sea, was bowing to a tall man who in profound embarrassment was clearing books and papers out of chairs.

‘Yes, that’s Lord Lamancha. You heard him yesterday. Charles, this is Colonel Raden, and Miss Agatha and Miss Janet. That is Mr. Crossby, the eminent journalist. That little scallywag is Fish Benjie, whom I believe you know. . . . Sit down, please, all of you. We’re caught out and are goin’ to confess. Behold the lair of John Macnab.’

Colonel Raden was recovering himself.

‘I read in the papers,’ he said, ‘that John Macnab is the reincarnation of Harald Blacktooth. In that case we are related. With which of these gentlemen have I the honour to claim kin?’

The words, the tone, convinced Sir Archie that the danger was past, and his nervousness fled.

‘Properly speakin’, you’ve found three new relatives. There they are. Not bad fellows, though they’ve been givin’ me a hectic time. Now *I* retire — shoes off, feet fired, and turned out to grass. Ned, you’ve a profes-

sional gift of exposition. Fire away, and tell the whole story.'

Sir Edward Leithen obeyed, and it may be said that the tale lost nothing in his telling. He described the case of three gentlemen, not wholly useless to their country, who had suddenly fallen into *ennui*. He told of a cure, now perfected, but of a challenge not yet complete. 'I've been trying to persuade Lord Lamancha to drop the thing,' he said, 'but the Claybodys have put his back up, and I'm not sure that I blame him. It didn't matter about you or Bandicott, for you took it like sportsmen, and we should have felt no disgrace in being beaten by you. But Claybody is different.'

'By Gad, sir, you are right,' the Colonel shouted, rising to his feet and striding about the room. 'He and his damned navvies are an insult to every gentleman in the Highlands. They're enough to make Harald Blacktooth rise from the dead. I should never think anything of Lord Lamancha again — and I've thought a devilish lot of him up to now — if he took this lying down. Do you know, sir' — turning to Lamancha — 'that I served in the Scots Guards with your father — we called them the Scots Fusiliers Guards in those days — and I am not going to fail his son.'

Sir Edward Leithen was a philosopher, with an acute sense of the ironies of life, and as he reflected that here was a laird, a Tory, and a strict preserver of game working himself into a passion over the moral rights of the poacher, he suddenly relapsed into helpless mirth. Colonel Raden regarded him sternly and uncomprehendingly, but Janet smiled, for she too had an eye for comedy.

'I'm tremendously grateful to you,' Lamancha said.

'You know more about stalking than all of us put together, and we want your advice.'

'Janet,' commanded her parent, 'you have the best brain in the family. I'll be obliged if you'll apply it to this problem.'

For an hour an anxious conclave surrounded the spread-out Ordnance map. Wattie was summoned, and with a horny forefinger expounded the probable tactics of Macnicol and the presumable disposition of the navy guard. At the end of the consultation Lamancha straightened his back.

'The odds are terribly steep. I can see myself dodging the navvies, and with Wattie's help getting up to a stag. But if Macnicol and the gillies are perched round the sanctuary they are morally certain to spot us, and, if we have to bolt, there's no chance of getting the beast over the march. That's a hole I see no way out of.'

'Janet,' said the Colonel, 'do you?'

Janet was looking abstractedly out of the window. 'I think it is going to clear up,' she observed, disregarding her father's question. 'It will be a fine afternoon, and then, if I am any judge of the weather, it will rain cats and dogs in the evening.'

'We had better scatter after luncheon,' said Lamancha, 'and each of us go for a long stride. We want to be in training for to-morrow.'

After the Colonel had suggested half a dozen schemes, the boldness of which was only matched by their futility, the Radens rose to go. Janet signalled to Benjie, who slipped out after her, and the two spoke in whispers in the hall, while Archie was collecting the mackintoshes from the kitchen.

‘I want you to be at Haripol this afternoon. Wait for me a little on this side of the lodge about half-past three.’

Benjie grinned and nodded. ‘Aye, lady, I’ll be there.’ He, too, had a plan for shortening the odds, and he had so great a respect for Janet’s sagacity that he thought it probable that she might have reached his own conclusion.

As Janet had foretold, it was a hot afternoon. The land steamed in the sun, but every hill-top was ominously clouded. While the inhabitants of Crask were engaged in taking stealthy but violent exercise among the sinuosities of Sir Archie’s estate, Janet Raden mounted her yellow pony and rode thoughtfully towards Haripol by way of Inverlarrig and the highroad. There were various short-cuts, suitable for a wildcat like Benjie, but after the morning’s torrential rains she had no fancy for swollen bogs and streams. She found Benjie lurking behind a boulder near the lodge, and in the shelter of a clump of birches engaged him in earnest conversation. Then she rode decorously through the gates and presented herself at the Castle door.

Haripol was immense, new, and, since it had been built by a good architect out of good stone, not without its raw dignity. Janet found Lady Claybody in a Tudor hall which had as much connection with a Scots castle as with a Kaffir kraal. There was a wonderful jumble of possessions — tapestries which included priceless sixteenth-century Flemish pieces, and French fakes of last year; Ming treasures and Munich atrocities; armour of which about a third was genuine; furniture indiscriminately Queen Anne, Sheraton, Jacobean, and Tottenham Court Road; and pictures which ranged from a Sir Joshua (an indifferent specimen) to a recent Royal Academy por-

trait of Lord Claybody. A feature was the number of electric lamps to illumine the hours of darkness, the supports of which varied from Spanish altar-candlesticks to two stuffed polar bears and a turbaned Ethiopian in coloured porcelain.

Lady Claybody was a heavily handsome woman still in her early fifties. The purchase of Haripol had been her doing, for romance lurked in her ample breast, and she dreamed of a new life in which she should be an unquestioned great lady, far from the compromising environment where the Claybody millions had been won. Her manner corresponded to her ambition, for it was stately and aloof, her speech was careful English seasoned with a few laboriously acquired Scots words, and in her household her wish was law. A merciful tyrant, she rarely resorted to ultimata, but when she issued a decree it was obeyed.

She was unaffectedly glad to see Janet, for the Radens were the sort of people she desired as friends. Two days before she had been at her most urbane to Agatha and the Colonel, and now she welcomed the younger daughter as an ambassador from that older world which she sought to make her own. A small terrier drowned her greetings with epileptic yelps.

'Silence, Roguie,' she enjoined. 'You must not bark at a fellow countrywoman. Roguie, you know, is so high-strung that he reacts to any new face. You find me quite alone, my dear. Our daughters do not join us till next week, when we shall have a houseful for the stalking. Now I am having a very quiet, delicious time drinking in the peace of this enchanted glen.'

She said no word of John Macnab, who was doubtless

the primary cause of this solitude. Lord Claybody and Johnson, it appeared, were out on the hill. Janet chattered on the kind of topics which she felt suitable — hunting in the Midlands, the coming Muirtown Gathering, the political meeting of yesterday.

‘Claybody thought Sir Archibald Roylance rather extravagant,’ said the lady, ‘but he was greatly impressed with Lord Lamancha’s speech. Surely it is absurd that this part of the Highlands, which your sister says was so loyal to Prince Charlie, should be a hot-bed of radicalism. Claybody thinks that that can all be changed, but not with a candidate who truckles to socialist nonsense.’

Janet was demure and acquiescent, sighing when her hostess sighed, condemning when she condemned. Presently the hot sun shining through the windows suggested the open air to Lady Claybody who was dressed for walking.

‘Shall we stroll a little before tea?’ she asked. ‘Wee Roguie has been cooped indoors all morning, and he loves a run, for he comes of a very sporting breed.’

They set forth accordingly, into gardens bathed in sunshine, and thence to the coolness of beech woods. The Reascuill, after leaving its precipitous glen, flows, like the Raden, for a mile or two in haughlands, which are split by the entry of a tributary, the Doran, which in its upper course is the boundary between Haripol and Crask. Between the two streams stands a wooded knoll which is a chief pleasaunce of the estate. It is a tangle of dwarf birches, bracken, and blaeberry, with ancient Scots firs on the summit, and from its winding walks there is a prospect of the high peaks of the forest rising black and jagged above the purple ridges.

At its foot they crossed the road which followed the river into the forest, and Janet caught sight of a group of men lounging by the bridge.

‘Have you workmen on the place just now?’ she asked.

‘Only wood-cutters, I think,’ said Lady Claybody.

Wee Roguie plunged madly into the undergrowth, and presently could be heard giving tongue, as if in pursuit of a rabbit. ‘Dear little fellow!’ said his mistress. ‘How he loves freedom!’

The ladies walked slowly to the crest of the knoll, where they halted to admire the view. Janet named the different summits, which looked ominously near, and then turned to gaze on the demesne of Haripol lying green and secure in its cincture of woods and water. ‘I think you have the most beautiful place in the Highlands,’ she told her hostess. ‘It beats Glenraden, for you have the sea.’

‘It is very lovely,’ was the answer. ‘I always think of it as a fortress, where we are defended against the troubles of the world. At Ronham one might as well be living in London, but here there are miles of battlements between us and dull everyday things. . . . Listen to Roguie! How happy he is!’

Roguie’s yelps sounded now close at hand, and now far off, as the scent led him. Presently, as the ladies moved back to the house, the sound grew fainter. ‘He will probably come out on the main avenue,’ his mistress said. ‘I like him to feel really free, but he always returns in good time for his little supper.’

They had tea in the tapestried hall, and then Janet took her leave. ‘I want to escape the storm,’ she explained, ‘for it is certain to rain hard again before night.’ As it chanced she did not escape it, but, after a wayside collo-

quy with a small boy, arrived at Glenraden as wet as if she had swum the Larrig. She had sent by Benjie a message to Crask, concerning her share in the plans of the morrow.

That night after dinner, while the rain beat on the windows, John Macnab was hard at work. The map was spread out on the table, and Lamancha prepared the orders for the coming action. If we would understand his plan, it is necessary to consider the nature of the terrain. The hill behind Crask rises to a line of small cliffs not unlike a South African *kranz*, and through a gap in the line runs a moorland track which descends by the valley of the Doran till it joins the main road from Inverlarrig almost at Haripol gates. The Doran glen — the Crask march is the stream — is a wide hollow of which the north side is the glacis of the great Haripol peaks. These are, in order from west to east, Stob Ban, Stob Coire Easain, Sgurr Mor, and the superb tower of Sgurr Dearg. Seen from the Crask ridge the summits rise in cones of rock from a glacis which at the foot is heather and scrub and farther up steepes of scree and boulders. Between each peak there is a pass leading over to the deep-cut glen of the Reascuill, which glen is contained on the north by the hills of Machray Forest.

It was certain that the navy cordon would be an outer line of defence, outside the wilder ground of the forest. Wattie expounded it with an insight which the facts were to justify. 'The men will be posted along the north side o' the Doran, maybe halfway up the hill — syne round the west side o' Stob Ban and across the Reascuill at the new fir plantin' — syne up the Machray march

along the taps o' Clonlet and Bheinn Fhada. They can leave out Sgurr Dearg, for ye'd hae to be a craw to get ower that side o't. By my way o' thinkin', they'll want maybe three hundred to mak a proper ring, and they'll want them thickest on the Machray side where the ground is roughest. North o' the Doran it's that bare that twa-three men could see the whole hillside, and Macnicol's no the ane to waste his folk. The easy road intil the sanctuary is frae Machray up the Reascuill, and the easy way to get a beast out wad be by way o' the Red Burn. But the navvies will be as thick as starlin's there, so it's no place for you and me, my lord.'

The Haripol sanctuary lay at the headwaters of the Reascuill, between what was called the Pinnacle Ridge of Sgurr Dearg and the cliffs of Sgurr Mor. As luck would have it, a fairly easy pass, known generally as the Bealach, led from it to the glen of the Doran. It was clear that Lamancha must enter from the south, and, if he got a stag, remove it by the same road.

'I'll get ye into the sanctuary, never fear,' said Wattie grimly. 'There's no a navvy ever whelpit wad keep you and me out. But when we're there, God help us, for we'll hae Macnicol to face. And if Providence is mercifu' and we get a beast, we've the navvies to get it through, and that's about the end o't. Ye canna mak yoursel' inconspicuous when ye're pu'in' at a muckle stag.'

'True,' said Lamancha, 'and that's just where Mr. Palliser-Yeates comes in. . . . John, my lad, your job is to be waiting on the Doran side of the Bealach, and, if you see Wattie and me with a beast, to draw off the navvies in that quarter. You had better move west towards Haripol, for there's better cover on that side. D'you

think you can do it? You used to have a pretty gift of speed, and you've always had an uncommon good eye for ground.'

Palliser-Yeates said modestly that he thought he was up to the job, provided Lamancha did not attract the prior notice of the watchers. Once the pack got on his trail, he fancied he could occupy their attention for an hour or two. The difficulty lay in keeping Lamancha in view, and for that purpose it would be necessary to ensconce himself at the very top of the Beallach where he could have a sight of the upper sanctuary.

To Leithen fell the onerous task of creating a diversion on the other side of the forest. He must start in the small hours and be somewhere on the Machray boundary when Lamancha was beginning operations. There lay the most obvious danger-point, and there the navvies would probably be thickest on the ground. At all costs their attention—and that of any Haripol gillies in the same quarter—must be diverted from what might be happening in the sanctuary. This was admittedly a hard duty, but Leithen was willing to undertake it. He was not greatly afraid of the navvies, who are a stiff-jointed race, but the Haripol gillies were another matter. 'You simply must not get caught,' Lamancha told him. 'If you're hunted, make a bee-line north to Machray and Glenaicill—the gillies won't be keen to be drawn too far away from Haripol. You won the school mile in your youth, and you're always in training. Hang it all, you ought to be able to keep Claybody's fellows on the run. I never yet knew a gillie quick on his feet.'

'That's a pre-War notion,' said Palliser-Yeates. 'Some of the young fellows are uncommon spry. Ned may win all right, but it won't be by much of a margin.'

The last point for decision was the transport of the stag. The moor-road from Crask was possible for a light car with a high clearance, and it was arranged that Archie should take the Ford by that route and wait in cover on the Crask side of the Doran. It was a long pull from the Beallach to the stream, but there were tributary ravines where the cover was good — always presuming that Palliser-Yeates had decoyed away the navvy guard.

‘Here’s the lay-out, then,’ said Lamancha at last. ‘Wattie and I get into the sanctuary as best we can and try for a stag. If we get him, we bring him through the Beallach; John views us and shows himself, and draws off the navvies, whom we assume to be few at this point. Then we drag the beast down to the Doran and sling it into Archie’s car. Meanwhile Ned is on the other side of the forest, doing his damndest to keep Macnicol busy. . . . That’s about the best we can do, but I needn’t point out to you that every minute we’re taking the most almighty chances. We may never get a shot. Macnicol may be in full cry after us long before we reach the Beallach. The navvies may refuse to be diverted by John, or may come back before we get near Archie’s car. . . . Ned may pipe to heedless ears, or, worse still, he may be nobbled and lugged off to the Haripol dungeons. . . . It’s no good looking for trouble before it comes, but I can see that there’s a big bank of it waiting for us. What really frightens me is Macnicol and the gillies at the sanctuary itself. This weather is in our favour, but even then I don’t see how they can miss hearing our shot, and that of course puts the lid on it.’

A time-table was drawn up after much discussion. Leithen was to start for Machray at 3 A.M., and be in

position about eight. Lamancha and Wattie about the latter hour, would be attempting to enter the sanctuary by the Beallach. Palliser-Yeates must be at his post not later than nine, and Archie with the car should reach the Doran by ten. The hour of subsequent happenings depended upon fate; the thing might be over for good or ill by noon, or it might drag on till midnight.

When the last arrangements had been settled, Lamancha squared his back against the mantelpiece and looked round on the company.

‘Of course we’re all blazing idiots — the whole thing is insanity — but we’ve done the best we can in the way of preparation. The great thing is for each of us to keep his wits about him and use them, for everything may go the opposite way to what we think. There’s no “according to Cocker” in this game.’

Archie was wrinkling his brows.

‘It’s all dashed ingenious, Charles, but do you think you have any real chance?’

‘Frankly, I don’t,’ was the answer. ‘The best we can hope for is to fail without being detected. I think there would be a far-away sporting chance if Macnicol could be tied up. That’s what sticks in my gizzard. I don’t see how it’s possible to get a shot in the sanctuary without Macnicol spotting it.’

Wattie Lithgow had returned, and caught the last words. He was grinning broadly.

‘I’m no positeeve but that Macnicol will be tied up,’ he observed. ‘Benjie’s here, and he’s brocht something wi’ him.’

He paused for effect.

‘It’s a dog — a wee, yelpin’ dog.’

‘Whose dog?’

‘Leddy Claybody’s. It seems that at Haripol her leddyship wears the breeks — that the grey mear is the better horse there — and it seems that she’s fair besottit on that dog. Benjie was sayin’ that if it was lost, Macnicol and a’body about the place wad be set lookin’ for’t, and naething wad be thought of at Haripol till it was fund.’

Archie rose in consternation.

‘D’ye mean to say — How on earth did the beast come here?’

‘It cam here wi’ Benjie. It’s fine and comfortable in a box in the stable. . . . I’m no just clear about what happened afore that, but I think Miss Janet Raden and Benjie gae’d ower to Haripol this afternoon and fund the puir wee beast lost in the wuds.’

Archie did not join in the laughter. His mind held no other emotion than a vast and delighted amazement. The lady, who two days before had striven to lift his life to a higher plane, who had been the sole inspiration of his successful speech of yesterday, was now discovered conspiring with Fish Benjie to steal a pup.

CHAPTER XI

HARIPOL — THE MAIN ATTACK

SOME men begin the day with loose sinews and a sluggish mind, and only acquire impetus as the hours proceed; others show a declining scale from the vigour of the dawn to the laxity of evening. It was fortunate for Lamancha that he belonged to the latter school. At daybreak he was obstinate, energetic, and frequently ill-tempered, as sundry colleagues in France and Palestine had learned to their cost; and it needed an obstinate man to leave Crask between the hours of five and six in the morning on an enterprise so wild and in weather so lamentable. For the rain came down in sheets, and a wind from the northeast put ice into it. He stopped for a moment on the summit of the Crask ridge, to contemplate a wall of driving mist where should have been a vista of the Haripol peaks. 'This wund will draw beasts intil the sanctuary without any help from Macnicol,' said Wattie morosely. 'It's ower fierce to last. I wager it will clear long afore night.'

'It's the weather we want,' said Lamancha, cowering from the violence of the blast.

'For the sanctuary — maybe. Up till then I'm no sae sure. It's that thick we micht maybe walk intil a navvy's airms.'

The gods of the sky were in a capricious mood. All down the Crask hillside to the edge of the Doran the wet tablecloth of the fog clung to every ridge and hollow. The stream was in roaring spate, and Lamancha and Wattie, already soaked to the skin, forded it knee-high. They had by this time crossed the moor-road from Crask to Haripol,

and marked the nook where in the lee of rocks and birches Archie was to be waiting with the Ford car. Beyond lay the long lift of land to the Haripol peaks. It was rough with boulders and heather, and broken with small gullies, and on its tangled face a man might readily lose himself. Wattie disliked the mist solely because it prevented him from locating the watchers, since his experience of life made him disinclined to leave anything to chance; but he had no trouble in finding his way in it. The consequence was that he took Lamancha over the glacis at the pace of a Gurkha, and in half an hour from the Doran's edge had him panting among the screes just under the Beallach which led to the sanctuary. Somewhere behind them were the vain navvy pickets, happily evaded in the fog.

Then suddenly the weather changed. The wind shifted a point to the east, the mist furled up, the rain ceased, and a world was revealed from which all colour had been washed, a world as bleak and raw as at its first creation. The grey screes sweated grey water, the sodden herbage was bleached like winter, the crags towering above them might have been of coal. A small fine rain still fell, but the visibility was now good enough to show them the ground behind them in the style of a muddy etching.

The consequence of this revelation was that Wattie shuffled into cover. He studied the hillside behind him long and patiently with his glass. Then he grunted: 'There's four navvies, as I mak out, but no verra well posted. We cam gey near ane o' them on the road up. Na, they canna see us here, and besides they're no lookin' this airt.'

Lamancha tried to find them with his telescope, but could see nothing human in the wide sopping wilderness.

Wattie grumbled as he led the way up a kind of *nullah*, usually as dry as Arabia but now spouting a thousand rivulets, right into the throat of the Beallach. 'It's clearin' just when we wanted it thick. The ways o' Providence is mysterious. . . . Na, na, there's nae road there. That's a fox's track, and it's the deer's road we maun gang. Stags will no climb rocks, sensible beasts. . . . The wind's gone, but I wish the mist wad come down again.'

At the top of the pass was a pad of flat ground, covered thick with the leaves of cloudberryes. On the right rose the Pinnacle Ridge of Sgurr Dearg, in its beginning an easy scramble which gave no hint of the awesome towers which later awaited the traveller; on the left Sgurr Mor ran up in a steep face of screes. 'Keep down,' Wattie enjoined, and crawled forward to where two boulders made a kind of window for a view to the north.

The two looked down into three little corries which, like the fingers of a hand, united in the palm of a larger corrie, which was the upper glen of the Reascuill. It was a sanctuary perfectly fashioned by nature, for the big corrie was cut off from the lower glen by a line of boiler-plates like the wall of a great dam, down which the stream plunged in cascades. The whole place was loud with water — the distant roar of the main river, the ceaseless dripping of the cliffs, the chatter and babble of myriad hidden rivulets. But the noise seemed only to deepen the secrecy. It was a world in monochrome, every detail clear as a wet pebble, but nowhere brightness or colour. Even the coats of the deer had taken on the dead grey of the slaty crags.

Never in his life had Lamancha seen so many beasts together. Each corrie was full of them, feeding on the

rough pastures, or among the boulders, drifting aimlessly across the spouts of scree below the high cliffs, sheltering in the rushy gullies. There were groups of hinds and calves, and knots of stags, and lone beasts on knolls or in mud-baths, and, since all were restless, the numbers in each corrie were constantly changing.

‘Ye gods, what a sight!’ Lamancha murmured, his head at Wattie’s elbow. ‘We won’t fail for lack of beasts.’

‘The trouble is,’ said Wattie, ‘that there’s ower mony.’ Then he added obscurely that ‘it might be the day o’ Pentecost.’

Lamancha was busy with his glass. Just below him, not three hundred yards off, where the ravine which ran from the Beallach opened out into the nearest corrie, there was a group of deer — three hinds, a little stag, and farther on a second stag of which only the head could be seen.

‘Wattie,’ he whispered excitedly, ‘there’s a beast down there — a shootable beast — It’s just what we’re looking for . . . close to the Beallach.’

‘Aye, I see it,’ was the answer. ‘And I see something mair. There’s a man ayont the big corrie — d’ye see yon rock shapit like a puddock-stool? . . . Na, the south side o’ the waterfall. . . . Well, follow on frae there towards Bheinn Fhada — have ye got him?’

‘Is that a man?’ asked the surprised Lamancha.

‘Where’s your een, my lord? It’s a man wi’ grey breeks and a brown jaicket — an’ he’s smokin’ a pipe. Aye, it’s Macqueen. I ken by the lang legs o’ him.’

‘Is he a Haripol gillie?’

‘He’s the second stalker. He’s under notice, for him and young Mr. Claybody doesna agree. Macqueen comes

frae the Lawlands, and has a verra shairp tongue. They was oot on the hill last week, and Mr. Johnson was pechin' sair gaun up the braes, an' no wonder, puir man. He cries on Macqueen to gang slow and says, apologetic-like, "Ye see, Macqueen, I've been workin' terrible hard the past year and it's damaged my wund." Macqueen, who canna bide the sight of him, says, "I'm glad to hear it, sir. I was feared it was maybe the drink." Gey impudent!

'Shocking.'

'Weel, he's workin' off his notice. . . . I'm pleased to see him yonder, for it means that Macnicol will no be there. Macnicol'—Wattie chuckled like a dropsical corn-crake—'is maist likely beatin' the roddydendrums for the wee dog. Macqueen is set there so as he can watch this Beallach and likewise the top of the Red Burn on the Machray side, which I was tellin' ye was the easiest road. If ye were to kill that stag doun below he could baith see ye and hear ye, and ye'd never be allowed to shift it a yaird. . . . Na, na. Seein' Macqueen's where he is, we maun try the wee corrie right under Sgurr Dearg. He canna see into that.'

'But we'll never get there through all those deer.'

'It will not be easy.'

'And if we get a stag we'll never be able to get it over this Beallach.'

'Indeed it will take a great deal of time. Maybe a' nicht. But I'll no say it's not possible. . . . Onyway, it is the best plan. We will have to tak a lang cast roond, and we maun na forget Macqueen. I'd give a five-pun-note for anither blatter o' rain.'

The next hour was one of the severest bodily trials

which Lamancha had ever known. Wattie led him up a chimney of Sgurr Mor, the depth of which made it safe from observation, and down another on the north face, also deep, and horribly loose and wet. This brought them to the floor of the first corrie at a point below where the deer had been observed. The next step was to cross the corrie eastwards towards Sgurr Dearg. This was a matter of high delicacy — first, because of the number of deer, second, because it was all within view of Macqueen's watch-tower.

Lamancha had followed in his time many stalkers, but he had never seen an artist who approached Wattie in skill. The place was littered with hinds and calves and stags, the cover was patchy at the best, and the beasts were restless. Wherever a route seemed plain the large ears and spindle shank of a hind appeared to block it. Had he been alone, Lamancha would either have sent every beast streaming before him in full sight of Macqueen, or he would have advanced at the rate of one yard an hour. But Wattie managed to move both circumspectly and swiftly. He seemed to know by instinct when a hind could be bluffed and when her suspicions must be laboriously quieted. The two went for the most part on their bellies like serpents, but their lowliness of movement would have been of no avail had not Wattie, by his sense of the subtle eddies of air, been able to shape a course which prevented their wind from shifting deer behind them. He well knew that any movement of beasts in any quarter would bring Macqueen's vigilant glasses into use.

Their task was not so hard so long as they were in hollows on the corrie floor. The danger came in crossing the

low ridge to that farther corrie which was beyond Macqueen's ken, for as they ascended the wind was almost bound to carry their scent to the deer through which they had passed. Wattie lay long with his chin in the mire and his eyes scanning the ridge till he made up his mind on his route. Obviously it was the choice of the least among several evils, for he shook his head and frowned.

The ascent of the ridge was a slow business, and toilful. Wattie was clearly following an elaborate plan, for he zigzagged preposterously, and would wait long for no apparent reason in places where Lamancha was held precariously by half a foothold and the pressure of his nails. Anxious glances were cast over his shoulder at the post where Macqueen was presumably on duty. The stalker's ears seemed of an uncanny keenness, for he would listen hard, hear something, and then utterly change his course. To Lamancha it was all inexplicable, for there appeared to be no deer on the ridge, and the place was so much in the lee that not a breath of wind seemed to be abroad to carry their scent. Hard as his condition was, he grew furiously warm and thirsty, and perhaps a little careless, for once or twice he let earth and stones slip under his feet.

Wattie turned on him fiercely. 'Gang as if ye was growin',' he whispered. 'There's beasts on a' sides.'

Sobered thereby, Lamancha mended his ways, and kept his thoughts rigidly on the job before him. He crept docilely in Wattie's prints, wondering why on a little ridge they should go through exertions that must be equivalent to the ascent of the Matterhorn. At last his guide stopped. 'Put your head between thae rashes,' he enjoined. 'Ye'll see her.'

'See what?' Lamancha gasped.

'That dour deevil o' a hind.'

There she was, a grey elderly beldame, with her wicked puck-like ears, aware and suspicious, not five yards off.

'We canna wait,' Wattie hissed. 'It's ower dangerous. Bide you here like a stone.'

He wriggled away to his right, while Lamancha, hanging on a heather root, watched the twitching ears and wrinkled nozzle. . . . Presently from farther up the hill came a sharp bark, which was almost a bleat. The hind flung up her head and gazed intently. . . . Five minutes later the sound was repeated, this time from a lower altitude. The beast sniffed, shook herself, and stamped with her foot. Then she laid back her ears, and trotted quietly over the crest.

Wattie was back again by Lamancha's side. 'That puzzled the auld bitch,' was his only comment. 'We can gang faster now, and God kens we've nae time to loss.'

As Lamancha lay panting at last on the top of the ridge, he looked down into the highest of the lesser corries, tucked right under the black cliffs of Sgurr Dearg. It was a little corrie, very steep, and threaded by a burn which after the rain was white like a snowdrift. Vast tumbled masses of stone, ancient rockfalls from the mountain, lay thick as the cottages in a hamlet. At first sight the place seemed to be without deer. Lamancha, scanning it with his glass, could detect no living thing among the débris.

Wattie was calling fiercely on his Maker.

'God, it's the auld hero,' he muttered, his eyes glued to his telescope.

At last Lamancha got his glass adjusted, and saw

what his companion saw. Far up the corrie on a patch of herbage — the last before the desert of the rocks began — stood three stags. Two were ordinary beasts, shootable, for they must have weighed sixteen or seventeen stone, but with inconsiderable heads. The third was no heavier, but he had a head like a blasted pine — going back fast, for the beast was old, but still with thirteen clearly marked points and a most noble spread of horn.

‘It’s him,’ Wattie crooned. ‘It’s the auld hero. Fine I ken him, for I seen him on Crask last back-end rivin’ at the stacks. There’s no a forest hereaways but they’ve had a try for him, but the deil’s in him, for the grandest shots aye miss. What’s your will, my lord? Dod, if John Macnab gets yon lad, he can cock his bonnet.’

Lamancha felt his heart beat faster. ‘I don’t know, Wattie. Is it fair to kill the best beast in the forest?’

‘Keep your mind easy about that. Yon’s no a Haripol beast. He’s oftener on Crask than on Haripol. He’s a traiveller, and in one season will cover the feck o’ the Highlands. I’ve heard that oreeginally he cam oot o’ Kintail. He’s terrible auld — some says a hundred year — and if ye dinna kill him he’ll perish next winter, belike, in a snaw-wreath, and that’s a puir death to dee.’

‘It’s a terrible pull to the Beallach.’

‘It will be that, but there’s the nicht afore us. If we don’t take that beast — or one o’ the three — I doubt we’ll no get anither chance.’

‘Push on, then, Wattie. It looks like a clear coast.’

‘I’m no so sure. There’s that deevil o’ a hind somewhere afore us.’

Down through the gaps of the Pinnacle Ridge blew fine streamers of mist. They were the precursors of a new

storm, for long before the two men had wormed their way into the corrie the mountain before them was blotted out with a curtain of rain, and the wind, which seemed for a time to have died away, was sounding a thousand notes in the Pan's-pipes of the crags.

'Good,' said Lamancha. 'This will blanket the shot.'

'Ba-ad too,' growled Wattie, 'for we'll be duntin' against the auld bitch.'

Lamancha believed he had located the stags well enough to go to them in black darkness. You had only to follow the stream to its head, and they were on the left bank a hundred yards or so from the rocks. But when he reached the burn, he found that his memory was useless. There was not one stream but dozens, and it was hard to say which was the main channel. It was a loud world again, very different from the first corrie, but when he would have hastened Wattie insisted on circumspection. 'There's the hind,' he said, 'and maybe some sma' stags. It's early in the day, man, and since we're out o' Macqueen's sight, there's nae need to hurry.'

His caution was justified. As they drew themselves up the side of a small cascade the tops of a pair of antlers were seen over the next rise. Lamancha thought they were those of one of the three stags, but Wattie disillusioned him. 'We're no within six hundred yards o' yon beasts,' he said.

A long circuit was necessary, happily in good cover, and the stream was not rejoined till at a point where its channel bore to the south, so that their wind would not be carried to the beasts below the knoll. After that it seemed advisable to Wattie to keep to the water, which was flowing in a deep-cut bed. It was a job for a merman

rather than breeched human beings, for Wattie would permit of no rising to a horizontal or even to a kneeling position. The burn entered at their collars and flowed steadily through their shirts to an exit at their knees. Never had men been so comprehensively and continuously wet. Lamancha's right arm ached with pulling the rifle along the bank — he always insisted on carrying his weapon himself — while his body was submerged in the icy outflow of Sgurr Dearg's springs.

The pressure of Wattie's foot in his face halted him. Blinking through the spray, he saw his leader's head raised stiffly to the alert in the direction of a little knoll. Even in the thick weather he could detect a pair of bat-like ears, and he realised that these ears were twitching. It did not need Wattie's whisper of 'the auld bitch' to reveal the enemy.

The two lay in the current for what seemed to Lamancha at least half an hour. He had enough hill-craft to recognise that their one hope was to stick to the channel, for only thus was there a chance of their presence being unrevealed by the wind. But the channel led them very close to the hind. If the brute chose to turn her foolish head they would be within view.

With desperate slowness, an inch at a time, Wattie moved upwards. He signed to Lamancha to wait while he traversed a pool where only his cap and nose showed above the water. Then came a peat-wallow, when his face seemed to be ground into the moss, and his limbs to be splayed like a frog's and to move with frog-like jerks. After that was a little cascade, and beyond, the shelter of a big boulder which would get him out of the hind's orbit. Lamancha watched this strange progress

with one eye; the other was on the twitching ears. Mercifully all went well, and Wattie's stern disappeared round a corner of rock.

He laboured to follow with the same precision. The pool was easy enough except for the trailing of the rifle. The peat was straightforward going, though in his desire to follow his leader's example he dipped his face so deep in the black slime that his nostrils were plugged with it, and some got into his eyes which he dared not try to remove. But the waterfall was a snag. It was no light task to draw himself up against the weight of descending water, and at the top he lay panting for a second, damming up the flow with his body. . . . Then he moved on; but the mischief had been done.

For the sound of the release of the pent-up stream had struck a foreign note on the hind's ear. It was an unfamiliar noise among the many familiar ones which at the moment filled the corrie. She turned her head sharply, and saw something in the burn which she did not quite understand. Lamancha, aware of her scrutiny, lay choking, with the water running into his nose; but the alarm had been given. The hind turned her head, and trotted off up wind.

The next he knew was Wattie at his elbow making wild signals to him to rise and follow. Cramped and staggering, he lumbered after him away from the stream into a moraine of great granite blocks. 'We're no twa hundred yards from the stags,' the guide whispered. 'The auld bitch will move them, but please God we'll get a shot.' As Lamancha ran, he marvelled at Wattie's skill, for he himself had not a notion where in the wide world the beasts might lie.

They raced to a knoll, and Wattie flung himself flat on the top.

‘There!’ he cried. ‘Steady, man. Tak the nearest. A hundred yards. Nae mair.’

Lamancha saw through the drizzle three stags moving at a gentle trot to the south — up-wind, for in the corrie the eddies were coming oddly. They were not really startled, but the hind had stirred them. The big stag was in the centre of the three, and the proper shot was the last — a reasonable broadside.

Wattie’s advice had been due to his loyalty to John Macnab, and not to his own choice, and this Lamancha knew. The desire of the great stag was on him, as it was on the hunter in Homer, and he refused to be content with the second-best. It was not an easy shot in that bad light, and it is probable that he would have missed; but suddenly Wattie gave an unearthly bark, and for a second the three beasts slowed down and turned their heads towards the sound.

In that second Lamancha fired. The great head seemed to bow itself, and then fling upwards, and all three disappeared at a gallop into the mist.

‘A damned poor tailoring shot!’ Lamancha groaned.

‘He’s deid for all that, but God kens how far he’ll run afore he drops. He’s hit in the neck, but a wee thing ower low. . . . We can bide here awhile and eat our piece. If ye wasna John Macnab, I could be wishin’ we had brought a dog.’

Lamancha, cold, wet, and disgusted, wolfed his sandwiches, had a stiff dram from his flask, and smoked a pipe before he started again. He cursed his marksmanship, and Wattie forbore to contradict him; doubtless Jim

Tarras had accustomed him to a standard of skill from which this was a woeful declension. Nor would he hold out much hope. 'He'll gang into the first corrie, and when he finds the wund different there, he'll turn back for the Reascuill. If this was our ain forest and the weather wasna that thick, we might get another chance at him there. . . . Oh, aye, he might gang for ten mile. The mist is a good thing, for Macqueen will no see what's happenin', but if it was to lift, and he saw a' the stags in the corrie movin', you and me wad hae to find a hidy-hole till the dark. . . . Are you ready, my lord?'

They crossed the ridge which separated them from the first corrie, close to the point where it took off from the *massif* of Sgurr Dearg. It was a shorter road than the one they had come by, and they could take it safely, for they were now moving up-wind, owing to the curious eddy from the south. Over the ridge it would be a different matter, for there the wind would be easterly as before. But it was a stiff climb and a slow business, for they had to make sure that they were on the track of the stag.

Wattie trailed the blood-marks like an Indian, noticing splashes on stones and rushes which Lamancha would have missed. 'He's sair hit,' he observed at one point. 'See! He tried that steep bit and couldna manage it. There's the mark o' his feet turnin'. . . . He's stoppit here. . . . Aye, here's his trail, and it'll be the best for you and me. There's nothing like a wounded beast for pickin' the easiest road.'

On the crest the air stirred freely, and, as it seemed to Lamancha, with a new chill. Wattie gave a grunt of satisfaction, and sniffed it like a pointer dog. He moistened

his finger and held it up; then he plucked some light grasses and tossed them into the air.

‘That’s a mercifu’ dispensation! Maybe that shot that ye think ye bauchled was the most providential shot ye ever fired. . . . The wind is shiftin’. I looked for it afore night, but no that early in the day. It’s wearin’ round to the south. D’ye see what that means?’

Lamancha shook his head. Disgust had made his wits dull.

‘Yon beast, as I telled ye, was a traiveller. There’s nothing to keep him in Haripol Forest. But he’ll no leave it unless the wind will let him. Now it looks as if Providence was kind to us. The wind’s blawin’ from the Bealach, and he’s bound to gang up-wind.’

The next half-hour was a period of swift drama. Sure enough, the blood-marks turned up the first corrie in the direction from which the two had come in the morning. As the ravine narrowed the stag had evidently taken to the burn, for there were splashes on the rocks and a tinge of red in the pools.

‘He’s no far off,’ Wattie croaked. ‘See, man, he’s verra near done. He’s slippin’ sair.’

And then, as they mounted, they came on a little pool where the water was dammed as if by a landslip. There, his body half under the cascade, lay the stag, stone dead, his great horns parting the fall like a pine swept down by a winter spate.

The two regarded him in silence, till Wattie was moved to pronounce his epitaph.

‘It’s yersel, ye auld hero, and ye’ve come by a grand end. Ye’ve had a braw life traivellin’ the hills, and ye’ve been a braw beast, and the fame o’ ye gaed through a’

the countryside. Ye micht have dwined away in the cauld winter and dee'd in the wame o' a snaw-drift. Or ye micht have been massacred by ane o' thae Haripol sumphs wi' ten bullets in the big bag. But ye've been killed clean and straucht by John Macnab, and that is a gentleman's death, whatever.'

'That's all very well,' said Lamancha. 'But you know I tailored the shot.'

'Ye're a fule!' cried the rapt Wattie. 'Ye did no siccan thing. It was a ver-ra deeficult shot, and you put it deid in the only place ye could see. I will not have seen many better shots at all, at all.'

'What about the gralloch?' Lamancha asked.

'No here. If the mist lifted, Macqueen micht see us. It's no fifty yards to the top o' the Beallach, and we'll find a place there for the job.'

Wattie produced two ropes and bound the fore feet and the hind feet together. Then he rapidly climbed to the summit, and reported on his return that the mist was thick there, and that there were no tracks except their own of the morning. It was a weary business dragging the carcase up a nearly perpendicular slope. First with difficulty they raised it out of the burn channel, and then drew it along the steep hillside. They had to go a long way up the hillside to avoid the rock curtain on the edge of the Beallach, but eventually the top was reached, and the stag was deposited behind some boulders on the left of the flat ground. Here, even if the mist lifted, they would be hid from the sight of Macqueen, and from any sentries there might be on the Crask side.

Wattie flung off his coat and proceeded with gusto to his gory task. The ravens, which had been following

them for the past hour, came nearer and croaked encouragement from the ledges of Sgurr Dearg and Sgurr Mor. Wattie was in high spirits, for he whistled softly at his work; but Lamancha, after his first moment of satisfaction, was restless with anxiety. He had still to get his trophy out of the forest, and there seemed many chances of a slip between his lips and that cup. He was impatient for Wattie to finish, for the air seemed to him lightening. An ominous brightness was flushing the mist towards the south, and the rain had declined to the thinnest of drizzles. He told Wattie his fears.

‘Aye, it’ll be a fine afternoon. I foresaw that, but that’s maybe not a bad thing, now that we’re out o’ Macqueen’s sight.’

Wattie completed his job, and hid the horrid signs below a pile of sods and stones. ‘Nae *poch-a-bhuie* for me the day,’ he grinned. ‘I’ve other things to think o’ besides my supper.’ He wiped his arms and hands in the wet heather and put on his coat. Then he produced a short pipe, and as he turned away to light it, a figure suddenly stood beside Lamancha and made his heart jump.

‘My hat!’ said Palliser-Yeates, ‘what a head! That must be about a record for Wester Ross. I never got anything as good myself. You’re a lucky devil, Charles.’

‘Call me lucky when the beast is safe at Crask. What about your side of the hill?’

‘Pretty quiet. I’ve been here for hours and hours, wondering where on earth you two had got to. . . . There’s four fellows stuck at intervals along the hillside, and I shouldn’t take them to be very active citizens. But there’s a fifth who does sentry-go, and I don’t fancy the look of him so much. Looks a keen chap, and spry on his

legs. What's the orders for me? The place has been playing hide-and-seek, and half the time I've been sitting coughing in a wet blanket. If it stays thick I suppose my part is off.'

Wattie, stirred again into fierce life, peered into the thinning fog.

'Damn! The mist's liftin'. I'll get the beast ower the first screes afore it's clear, and once I'm in the burn I'll wait for ye. I can manage the first bit fine mysel' — I could manage it a', if there was nae hurry. . . . Bide you here till I'm weel startit, for I don't like the news o' that wanderin' navvy. And you, sir' — this to Palliser-Yeates — 'be ready to show yourself down the hillside as soon as it's clear enough for the folk to see ye. Keep well to the west, and draw them off towards Haripol. There's a man posted near the burn, but he's the farthest east o' them, and for God's sake keep them to the west o' me and the stag. You're an auld hand at the job, and should have nae deeficulty in ficklin' a wheen heavy-fitted navvies. Is Sir Erchibald there wi' the cawr?'

'I suppose so. The time he was due the fog was thick. I couldn't pick him up from here with the glass when the weather cleared, but that's as it should be, for the place he selected was absolutely hidden from this side.'

'Well, good luck to us a'.' Wattie tossed off a dram from the socket of Lamanca's flask, and, dragging the stag by the horns, disappeared in two seconds from sight.

'I'll be off, Charles,' said Palliser-Yeates, 'for I'd better get down hill and down the glen before I start.' He paused to stare at his friend. 'By gad, you do look a proper blackguard. Do you realise that you've a face like a nigger and a two-foot rent in your bags? It would be good for Johnson Claybody's soul to see you!'

CHAPTER XII

HARIPOL — TRANSPORT

IT may be doubted whether in clear weather Sir Archie could ever have reached his station unobserved by the watchers on the hill. The place was cunningly chosen, for the road, as it approached the Doran, ran in the lee of a long covert of birch and hazel, so that for the better part of a mile no car on it could be seen from beyond the stream, even from the highest ground. But as the car descended from the Crask ridge it would have been apparent to the sentinels, and its non-appearance beyond the covert would have bred suspicion. As it was, the clear spell had gone before it topped the hill, for Sir Archie was more than an hour behind the scheduled time.

This was Janet's doing. She had started off betimes on the yellow pony for Crask, intending to take the bye-way from the Larrig side, but before she reached the Bridge of Larrig she had scented danger. One of the correspondents, halted by the roadside with a motor bicycle, accosted her with great politeness and begged a word. She was Miss Raden, wasn't she? and therefore she knew all about John Macnab. He had heard gossip in the glen of the coming raid on Haripol, and understood that this was the day. Would Miss Raden advise him from her knowledge of the countryside? Was it possible to find some coign of vantage from which he might see the fun?

Janet stuck to the simple truth. She had heard the same story, she admitted, but Haripol was a gigantic and precipitous forest, and it was preserved with a nicety un-

paralleled in her experience. To go to Haripol in the hope of finding John Macnab would be like a casual visit to England on the chance of meeting the King. She advised him to go to Haripol in the evening. 'If anything has happened there,' she said, 'you will hear about it from the gillies. They'll either be triumphant or savage, and in either case they'll talk.'

'We've got to get a story, Miss Raden,' the correspondent observed dismally, 'and in this roomy place it's like looking for a needle in a hayfield. What sort of people are the Claybodys?'

'You won't get anything from them,' Janet laughed. 'Take my advice and wait till the evening.'

When he was out of sight she turned her pony up the hill and arrived at Crask with an anxious face. 'If these people are on the loose all day,' she told Sir Archie, 'they're bound to spoil sport. They may stumble on our car, or they may see more of Mr. Palliser-Yeates's doings than we want. Can nothing be done? What about Mr. Crossby?'

Crossby was called into consultation and admitted the gravity of the danger. When his help was demanded, he hesitated. 'Of course I know most of them, and they know me, and they're a very decent lot of fellows. But they're professional men, and I don't see myself taking on the job of gulling them. *Esprit de corps*, you know. . . . No, they don't suspect me. They probably think I left the place after I got off the Strathlarrig fish scoop, and that I don't know anything about the Haripol business. I dare say they'd be glad enough to see me if I turned up . . . I might link on to them and go with them to Haripol and keep them in a safe place.'

‘That’s the plan,’ said Archie. ‘You march them off to Haripol — say you know the ground — which you do a long sight better than they. Some of the gillies will be hunting the home woods for Lady Claybody’s pup. Get them mixed up in that show. It will all help to damage Macnicol’s temper, and he’s the chap we’re most afraid of. . . . Besides, you might turn up handy in a crisis. Supposin’ Ned Leithen—or old John—has a hard run at the finish, you might confuse the pursuit. . . . That’s the game, Crossby my lad, and you’re the man to play it.’

It was after eleven o’clock before the Ford car, having slipped over the pass from Crask in driving sleet, came to a stand in the screen of birches, with the mist wrapping the world so close that the foaming Doran six yards away was only to be recognised by its voice. All the way there Sir Archie had been full of forebodings.

‘We’re givin’ too much weight away, Miss Janet,’ he croaked. ‘All we’ve got on our side is this putrid weather. That’s a bit of luck, I admit. Also we’ve two of the most compromisin’ objects on earth, Fish Benjie and that little brute Roguie. . . . Claybody has a hundred navvies, and a pack of gillies, and every beast will be in the sanctuary, which is as good as inside a barb-wirefence. . . . The thing’s too ridiculous. We’ve got to sit in this car and watch an eminent British statesman bein’ hoofed off the hill, while old John tries to play the decoy-duck, and Ned Leithen, miles off, is hoppin’ like a he-goat on the mountains. . . . It’s pretty well bound to end in disaster. One of them will be nobbled — probably all three — and when young Claybody asks, “Wherefore this outrage?” I don’t see what the cowerin’ culprit is goin’ to answer and say unto him.’

But when the car stopped in the drip of the birches, and Archie had leisure to look at the girl by his side, he began to think less of impending perils. The place was loud with wind and water, and yet curiously silent. The mist had drawn so close that the two seemed to be shut into a fantastic, secret world of their own. Janet was wearing breeches and a long riding-coat covered by a grey oilskin, the buttoned collar of which framed her small face. Her bright hair, dappled with raindrops, was battened down under an ancient felt hat. She looked, thought Sir Archie, like an adorable boy. Also for the last half-hour she had been silent.

‘You have never spoken to me about your speech,’ she said at last, looking away from him.

‘Yours, you mean,’ he said. ‘I only repeated what you said that afternoon on Carnmore. But you didn’t hear it. I looked for you everywhere in the hall, and I saw your father and your sister and Bandicott, but I couldn’t see you.’

‘I was there. Did you think I could have missed it? But I was too nervous to sit with the others, so I found a corner at the back below the gallery. I was quite near Wattie Lithgow.’

Archie’s heart fluttered. ‘That was uncommon kind. I don’t see why you should have worried about that — I mean I’m jolly grateful. I was just going to play the ass of all creation when I remembered what you had said — and — well, I made a speech instead of repeating the rigmarole I had written. I owe everything to you, for, you see, you started me out — I can never feel just that kind of funk again. . . . Charles thinks I might be some use in politics. . . . But I can tell you when I sat down and hunted

through the hall and couldn't see you, it took all the guilt off the gingerbread.'

'I was gibbering with fright,' said the girl, 'when I thought you were going to stick. If Wattie hadn't shouted out, I think I would have done it myself.'

After that silence fell. The rain poured from the trees on to the cover of the Ford, and from the cover sheets of water cascaded to the drenched heather. Wet blasts scourged the occupants and whipped a high colour into their faces. Janet arose and got out.

'We may as well be properly wet,' she said. 'If they get the stag as far as the Doran, they must find some way across. There's none at present. Hadn't we better build a bridge?'

The stream, in ordinary weather a wide channel of stones where a slender current falls in amber pools—was now a torrent four yards wide. But it was a deceptive torrent with more noise than strength, and save in the pools was only a foot or two deep. There were many places where a stag could have been easily lugged through by an able-bodied man. But the bridge-building proposal was welcomed, since it provided relief for both from an atmosphere which had suddenly become heavily charged. At a point where the channel narrowed between two blaeberry-thatched rocks it was possible to make an inclined bridge from one bank to the other. The materials were there in the shape of sundry larch poles brought from the lower woods for the repair of a bridge on the Crask road. Archie dragged half a dozen to the edge and pushed them across. Then Janet marched through the water, which ran close to the top of her riding-boots, and prepared the abutment on the farther shore, weight-

ing the poles down with sods broken from an adjacent bank.

'I'm coming over,' she cried. 'If it will bear a stag, it will bear me.'

'No, you're not,' Archie commanded. 'I'll come to you.'

'The last time I saw you cross a stream you fell in,' she reminded him.

Archie tested the contrivance, but it showed an ugly inclination to behave like a see-saw, being insufficiently weighted on Janet's side.

'Wait a moment. We need more turf,' and she disappeared from sight beyond a knoll.

When she returned, she was excessively muddy as to hands and garments.

'I slipped in that beastly peat-moss,' she explained. 'I never saw such hags and there's no turf to be got except with a spade. . . . No, you don't! Keep off that bridge, please. It isn't nearly safe yet. I'm going to roll down stones.'

Roll down stones she did till she had erected something very much like a cairn at her end, which would have opposed a considerable barrier to the passage of any stag. Then she announced that she must get clean, and went a few yards downstream to one of the open shallows, where she proceeded to make a toilet. She stood with the current flowing almost to her knees, suffering it to wash the peat from her boots and the skirts of her oilskin and at the same time scrubbing her grimy hands. In the process her hat became loose, dropped into the stream, and was clutched with one hand, while with the other she restrained the efforts of the wind to uncoil her shining curls.

It was while watching the moving waters at this priest-like task that crisis came upon Sir Archie. In a blinding second he realised with the uttermost certainty that he had found his mate. He had known it before, but now came the flash of supreme conviction. . . . For swelling bosoms and pouting lips and soft curves and languishing eyes Archie had only the most distant regard. He saluted them respectfully and passed by on the other side of the road — they did not belong to his world. But that slender figure splashing in the tawny eddies made a different appeal. Most women in such a posture would have looked tousled and flimsy, creatures ill at ease, with their careful allure beaten out of them by weather. But this girl was an authentic creature of the hills and winds — her young slimness bent tensely against the current, her exquisite head and figure made more fine and delicate by the conflict. It is a sad commentary on the young man's education, but, while his soul was bubbling with poetry, the epithet which kept recurring to his mind was 'clean-run.' . . . More, far more. He saw in that moment of revelation a comrade who would never fail him, with whom he could keep step on all the roads of life. It was that which all his days he had been confusedly seeking.

'Janet,' he shouted against the wind, 'will you marry me?'

She made a trumpet of one hand.

'What do you say?' she cried.

'Will you marry me?'

'Yes' — she turned a laughing face — 'of course I will.'

'I'm coming across,' he shouted.

‘No. Stay where you are. I’ll come to you.’

She climbed the other bank and made for the bridge of larch-poles, and before he could prevent her she had embarked on that crazy structure. Then that happened which might have been foreseen, since the poles on Archie’s side of the stream had no fixed foundation. They splayed out, and he was just in time to catch her in his arms as she sprang.

‘You darling girl,’ he said, and she turned up to him a face, smiling no more, but very grave.

Archie, his arms full of dripping maiden, stood in a happy trance.

‘Please put me down,’ she said. ‘See, the mist is clearing. We must get into cover.’

Sure enough the haze was lifting from the hillside before them and long tongues of black moorland were revealed stretching up to the crags. They found a place among the birches which gave them a safe prospect and fetched luncheon from the car. Hot coffee from a thermos was the staple of the meal, which they consumed like two preoccupied children. Archie looked at his watch and found it after two o’clock. ‘Something must begin to happen soon,’ he said, and they took up position side by side on a sloping rock, Janet with her Zeiss glasses and Archie with his telescope.

His head was a delicious merry-go-round of hopes and dreams. It was full of noble thoughts — about Janet, and himself, and life. And the thoughts were mirthful too — a great mellow philosophic mirthfulness. John Macnab was no longer an embarrassing hazard, but a glorious adventure. It did not matter what happened — nothing could happen wrong in this spacious and rosy world. If

Lamancha succeeded, it was a tremendous joke; if he failed, a more tremendous; and, as for Leithen and Palliser-Yeates comedy had marked them for its own. . . . He wondered what he had done to be blessed with such happiness.

Already the mist had gone from the foreground, and the hills were clear to halfway up the rocks of Sgurr Mor and Sgurr Dearg. He had his glass on the Beallach, on the throat of which a stray sun-gleam made a sudden patch of amethyst.

‘I see some one,’ Janet cried. ‘On the edge of the pass. Have you got it? — on the left-hand side of that spout of stones.’

Archie found the place. ‘Got him. . . . By Jove, it’s Wattie. . . . And — and — yes, by all the gods, I believe he’s pullin’ a stag down. . . . Wait a second. . . . Yes, he’s haulin’ it into the burn. . . . Well done, our side! But where on earth is Charles?’

‘The two lay with their eyes glued on the patch of hill, now lit everywhere by the emerging sun. They saw the little figure dip into a hollow, appear again, and then go out of sight in the upper part of a long narrow scaur which held the headwaters of a stream — they could see the foam of the little falls farther down. Before it disappeared, Archie had made out a stag’s head against a background of green moss.

‘That’s that,’ he cried. ‘Charles must be somewhere behind protectin’ the rear. I suppose Wattie knows what he’s doin’ and is certain he can’t be seen by the navvies. Anyhow, he’s well hidden at present in the burn, but he’ll come into view lower down when the ravine opens out. He’s a tough old bird to move a beast at that pace.

... The question now is, where is old John? It's time he was gettin' busy.'

Janet, whose glass made up in width of range what it lacked in power, suddenly cried out, 'I see him. Look! up at the edge of the rocks — three hundred yards west of the Beallach. He's moving downhill. I think it's Mr. Palliser-Yeates — he's the part of John Macnab I know best.'

Archie found the spot. 'It's old John right enough, and he's doin' his best to make himself conspicuous. Those yellow breeks of his are like a flag. We've got a seat in the stalls and the curtain is goin' up. Now for some fun.'

Then followed for the better part of an hour a drama of almost indecent sensation. Wattie and his stag were forgotten in watching the efforts of an eminent banker to play hare to the hounds of four gentlemen accustomed to labour rather with their hands than with their feet. It was the navvy whose post was almost directly opposite Janet and Archie who first caught sight of the figure on the hillside. He blew a whistle and began to move uphill, evidently with the intention of cutting off the intruder's retreat to the east and driving him towards Haripol. But the quarry showed no wish to go east, for it was towards Haripol that he seemed to be making, by a long slant down the slopes.

'I've got Number Two,' Janet whispered. 'There — above the patch of scrub — close to the three boulders. ... Oh, and there's Number Three. Mr. Palliser-Yeates is walking straight towards him. Do you think he sees him?'

'Trust old John. He's the wiliest of God's creatures.

and he hasn't lost much pace since he played outside-three-quarters for England. Wait till he starts to run.'

But Mr. Palliser-Yeates continued at a brisk walk, apparently oblivious of his foes, who were whistling like curlews, till he was very near the embraces of Number Three. Then he went through a very creditable piece of acting. Suddenly he seemed to be stricken with terror, looked wildly around to all the points of the compass, noted his pursuer, and, as if in a panic, ran blindly for the gap between Numbers Two and Three. Number Four had appeared by this time, and Number Four was a strategist. He did not join in the pursuit, but moved rapidly down the glen towards Haripol to cut off the fugitive, should he outstrip the hunters.

Palliser-Yeates managed to get through the gap, and now appeared running strongly for the Doran, which at that point of its course — about half a mile downstream from Janet and Archie — flowed in a deep-cut but not precipitous channel, much choked with birch and rowan. Numbers Two and Three followed, and also Number One, who had by now seen that there was no need of a rear-guard. For a little all four disappeared from sight, and Janet and Archie looked anxiously at each other. Cries, excited cries, were coming upstream, but there was no sign of human beings.

'John can't have been such a fool as to get caught,' Archie grumbled. 'He has easily the pace of those heavy-footed chaps. Wish he'd show himself.'

Presently first one, then a second, then a third navvy appeared on the high bank of the Doran, moving aimlessly, like hounds at fault.

'They've lost him,' Archie cried. 'Where d'you sup-

pose the leery old bird has got to? He can't have gone to earth.'

That was not revealed for about twenty minutes. Then a cry from one of the navvies called the attention of the others to something moving high up on the hillside.

'It's John,' Archie muttered. 'He must have crawled up one of the side burns. Lord, that's pretty work.'

The navvies began heavily to follow, though they had a thousand feet of leeway to make up. But it was no part of Palliser-Yeates's plan to discourage them, since he had to draw them clean away from the danger zone. Already this was almost achieved, for Wattie and his stag, even if he had left the ravine, were completely hidden from their view by a shoulder of hill. He pretended to be labouring hard, stumbling often, and now and then throwing himself on the heather in an attitude of utter fatigue, which was visible to the pursuit below.

'It's a dashed shame,' murmured Archie. 'Those poor fellows haven't a chance with John. I only hope Claybody is payin' them well for this job.'

The hare let the hounds get within a hundred yards of him. Then he appeared to realise their presence and to struggle to increase his pace, but, instead of ascending, he moved horizontally along the slope, slipping and sprawling in what looked like a desperate final effort. Hope revived in the navvies' hearts. Their voices could be heard — 'You bet they're usin' shockin' language,' said Archie — and Number One, who seemed the freshest, put on a creditable spurt. Palliser-Yeates waited till the man was almost upon him, and then suddenly turned downhill. He ran straight for Number Two, dodged him with that famous swerve which long ago on the football

field had set forty thousand people shouting, and went down the hill like a rolling stone. Once past the navvy line, he seemed to slide a dozen yards and roll over, and when he got up he limped.

‘Oh, he has hurt himself,’ Janet cried.

‘Not a bit of it,’ said Archie. ‘It’s the old fox’s cunning. He’s simply playin’ with the poor fellows. Oh, it’s wicked!’

The navvies followed with difficulty, for they had no gift of speed on a steep hill-face. Palliser-Yeates waited again till they were very near him, and then, like a hen partridge dragging its wing, trotted down the more level ground by the stream side. The pursuit was badly cooked, but it lumbered gallantly along, Number Four now making the running. A quarter of a mile ahead was the beginning of the big Haripol woods which clothed the western skirts of Stob Ban, and stretched to the demesne itself.

Suddenly Palliser-Yeates increased his pace, with no sign of a limp, and, when he passed out of sight of the two on the rock, was going strongly.

Archie shut up his glass. ‘That’s a workmanlike show, if you like. He’ll tangle them up in the woods, and slip out at his leisure and come home. I knew old John was abso-lute-ly safe. If he doesn’t run slap into Macnicol —’

He broke off and stared in front of him. A figure like some ancient earth-dweller had appeared on the opposite bank. Hair, face, and beard were grimed with peat, sweat made furrows in the grime, and two fierce eyes glowered under shaggy eyebrows. Bumping against its knees were the antlers of a noble stag.

‘Wattie!’ the two exclaimed with one voice.

‘You old sportsman,’ cried Archie. ‘Did you pull that great brute all the way yourself? Where is Lord Lamancha?’

The stalker strode into the water dragging the stag behind him, and did not halt till he had it high on the bank and close to the car. Then he turned his eyes on the two, and wrung the moisture from his beard.

‘You needn’t worry,’ Archie told him. ‘Mr. Palliser-Yeates has all the navvies in the Haripol woods.’

‘So I was thinkin’. I got a glisk of him up the burn. Yon’s the soople one. But we’ve no time to lose. Help me to sling the beast into the cawr. This is a fine hidy-hole.’

‘Gad, what a stag!’

‘It’s the auld beast we’ve seen for the last five years. Ye mind me tellin’ ye that he was at our stacks last winter. Come on quick, for I’ll no be easy till he’s in the Crask larder.’

‘But Lord Lamancha?’

‘Never heed him. He’s somewhere up the hill. It maitters little if he waits till the darkenin’ afore he comes hame. The thing is, we’ve got the stag. Are ye ready?’

Archie started the car which had already been turned in the right direction. Coats and wraps and heather were piled on the freight, and Wattie seated himself atop like an ancient faven.

‘Now, tak a spy, afore ye start. Is the place clear?’

Archie, from the rock, reported that the hillside was empty.

‘What about the Beallach?’

Archie spied long and carefully. ‘I see nothing there,

but of course I only see the south end. There's a rock which hides the top.'

'No sign o' his lordship?'

'Not a sign.'

'Never heed. He can look after himsel' braw and weel. Push on wi' the cawr, sir, for it's time we were ower the hill.'

Archie obeyed, and presently they were climbing the long zigzag to the Crask pass. Wattie on the back seat kept an anxious lookout, issuing frequent bulletins, and Janet swept the glen with her glasses. But no sign of life appeared in the wide sunlit place except a buzzard high in the heavens and a weasel slipping into a cairn. Once the watershed had been crossed, Wattie's heart lightened.

'Weel done, John Macnab,' he cried. 'Dod, ye're the great lad. Ye've beaten a hundrad navvies and Macnicol and a', and ye've gotten the best heid in the countryside. . . . Hae ye a match for my pipe, Sir Erchie? Mine's bin in ower mony bog-holes to kindle.'

It was a clear, rain-washed world on which they looked, and the sky to the south was all an unbroken blue. The air was not sticky and oppressive like yesterday, but pure and balmy and crystalline. When Crask was reached, the stag was decanted with expedition, and Archie addressed Janet with a new authority.

'I'm goin' to take you straight home in the Hispana. You're drippin' wet and ought to change at once.'

'Might I change here?' the girl asked. 'I told them to send over dry things, for I was sure it would be a fine afternoon. You see, I think we ought to go to Haripol.'

'Whatever for?'

'To be in at the finish — and also to give Lady Clay-

body back her dog. Wee Rogueie is rather on my conscience.'

'That's a good notion,' Archie assented.

So Janet was handed over to Mrs. Lithgow, who admitted that a suit-case had indeed arrived from Glenraden. Archie repaired to the upper bathroom, which Lamancha had aforetime likened to a drain-pipe, and, having bathed rapidly, habited himself in a suit of a reasonable newness and took special pains with his toilet. And all the while he whistled and sang, and generally comported himself like a madman. Janet was under his roof — Janet would soon always be there — the most miraculous of fates was his! Somebody must be told, so when he was ready he went out to seek the Bluidy Mackenzie, and made that serious-minded beast the receptacle of his confidences.

He returned to find a neat and smiling young woman conversing with Fish Benjie, whose task had been that of comforter and friend to Rogueie. It appeared that the small dog had been having the morning of his life with the Crask rats and rabbits. 'He's no a bad wee dog,' Benjie reported, 'if they'd let him alane. They break his temper keepin' him indoors and feedin' him ower high.'

'Benjie must come too,' Janet announced. 'It would be a shame to keep him back. You understand — Benjie found Rogueie in the woods — which is true, and handed him over to me — which is also true. I don't like unnecessary fibbing.'

'Right-o! Let's have the whole bag of tricks. But I say you've got to stage-manage this show. Benjie and I put ourselves in your hands, for I'm hanged if I know what to say to Lady Claybody.'

‘It’s quite simple. We’re just three nice clean people — well, two clean people — who go to Haripol on an errand of mercy. Get out the Hispana, Archie dear, for I feel that something tremendous may be happening there.’

As they started — Benjie and Roguie on the back seat — the Bluidy Mackenzie came into view, hungrily eyeing an expedition from which he seemed to be barred.

‘D’you mind if we take Mackenzie?’ Archie begged. ‘We’ll go very slow, and he can trollop behind. The poor old fellow has been havin’ a lonely time of it, and there’s likely to be such a mix-up at Haripol that an extra hound won’t signify.’

Janet approved, and they swung down the hill and on to the highway, as respectable an outfit as the heart could wish, except for the water-proof-caped urchin on the back seat. The casual wayfarer would have noted only a very pretty girl and a well-appointed young man driving an expensive car at a most blameless pace. He could not guess what a cargo of dog-thieves and deer-thieves was behind the shining metal and spruce enamel. . . . Benjie talked to wee Roguie in his own tongue, and what Janet and Archie said in whispers to each other is no concern of this chronicle. The sea at Inverlarrig was molten silver running to the translucent blue of the horizon, the shore woods gleamed with a thousand jewels, the abundant waters plashing in every hollow were channels of living light. The world sang in streams and soft winds, in the cries of plover and the pipe of shore birds, and Archie’s heart sang above them all.

Close to Haripol gates a tall figure rose from the milestone as the car slowed down.

'Well, John, my aged sportsman, you did your part like a man. We saw it all.'

'How are things going?'

'Famously.'

'The stag?'

'In the Crask larder.'

'And Charles?'

'Lost. Believed to be still lurkin' in the hills. Look here, John, get in beside Benjie. We are goin' to call at Haripol and restore the pup. You'll be a tower of strength to us, and old Claybody will be tremendously bucked to meet a brother magnate. . . . Really, I mean it.'

'I'm scarcely presentable,' said Palliser-Yeates, taking off an old cap and looking at it meditatively.

'Rot! You're as tidy as you'll ever be. Rather dandified for you. In you get, and don't tread on the hound. . . . Bluidy, you brute, don't you know a pal when you see him?'

CHAPTER XIII

HARIPOL — AUXILIARY TROOPS

HALFWAY down the avenue Archie drew up sharp.

‘I forgot about Mackenzie. We can’t have him here — he’ll play the fool somehow. Benjie, out you get. You’re one of the few that can manage him. Here’s his lead — you tie him up somewhere and watch for us, and we’ll pick you up outside the gates when we start home. . . . Don’t get into trouble on your own account. I advise you to cut round to the bothies, and try to find out what is happenin’.’

On the massive doorstep of Haripol stood Lady Claybody, parasol in one hand and the now useless dog-whip in the other. She made a motion as if to retreat, but thought better of it. Her face was flushed, and her air had abated something of its serenity. The sight of Janet — for she looked at Archie without recognition — seemed to awake her to the duties of hospitality, and she advanced with outstretched hand. Then a yelp from the side of Palliser-Yeates wrung from her an answering cry. In a trice wee Roguie was in her arms.

‘Yes,’ Janet explained sweetly, ‘it’s Roguie quite safe and well. There’s a boy who sells fish at Strathlarrig — Benjie they call him — he found him in the woods and brought him to me. I hope you haven’t been worried.’

But Lady Claybody was not listening. She had set the dog on its feet and was wagging her forefinger at him, a procedure which seemed to rouse all the latent epilepsy of his nature. ‘Oh, you naughty, naughty Roguie! Cruel,

cruel doggie! He loved freedom better than his happy home. Master and Mistress have been so anxious about wee Róguie.'

It was an invocation which lasted for two and a half minutes till the invoker realised the presence of the men. She graciously shook hands with Sir Archie.

'I drove Miss Janet over,' said the young man, explaining the obvious. 'And I took the liberty of bringin' a friend who is stayin' with me — Mr. Palliser-Yeates. I thought Lord Claybody might like to meet him, for I expect he knows all about him.'

The lady beamed on both. 'This is a very great pleasure, Mr. Palliser-Yeates, and I'm sure Claybody will be delighted. He ought to be in for tea very soon.' As it chanced, Lady Claybody had an excellent memory and a receptive ear for talk, and she was aware that in her husband's conversation the name of Palliser-Yeates occurred often, and always in dignified connections.

She led the way through the hall to a vast new drawing-room which commanded a wide stretch of lawns and flower-beds as far as the woods which muffled the mouth of the Reascuill glen. When the party were seated and butler and footman had brought the materials for tea, Lady Claybody — Roguie on a cushion by her side — became confidential.

'We've had such a wearing day, my dear,' she turned to Janet. 'First, the ruffian who calls himself John Macnab is probably trying to poach our forest. The rain yesterday kept him off, but we have good reason to believe that he will come to-day. Poor Johnson has been on the hill since breakfast. Then, there was the anxiety about Roguie. I've had our people searching the woods and shrub-

beries, for the little darling might have been caught in a trap. . . . Macnicol says there are no traps, but you never can tell. And then, on the top of it all, we've been besieged since quite early in the morning by insolent journalists. No. They hadn't the good manners to come to the house — I should have sent them packing — but they have been all over the grounds and button-holing our servants. They want to hear about John Macnab, but we can't tell them anything, for as yet we know nothing ourselves. I gave orders that they should be turned out of the place — no violence, of course, for it doesn't do to offend the Press, but quite firmly, for they were trespassing. Would you believe it, my dear? they wouldn't go. So our people had simply to drive them out, and it has taken nearly all day, and they may be coming back any moment. . . . Something should really be done, Mr. Palliser-Yeates, to restrain the license of the modern Press, with its horrid, vulgar sensationalism and its invasion of all the sanctities of private life.'

Palliser-Yeates cordially agreed. The lady had not looked to Archie for assent, and her manner towards him was a trifle cold. Perhaps it was the memory of her visit a fortnight before, when he was sickening for smallpox; perhaps it was her husband's emphatic condemnation of his Muirtown speech.

At this point Lord Claybody entered, magnificent in a kilt of fawn-coloured tweed and a ferocious sporran made of the mask of a dog-otter. The garments, which were aggressively new, did not become his short, square figure.

'I don't think you have met my husband, Miss Raden,' said his wife. Then to Claybody: 'You know Sir Archi-

bald Roylance. And this is Mr. Palliser-Yeates, who has been so kind as to come over to see us.'

Palliser-Yeates was greeted with enthusiasm. 'Delighted to meet you, sir. I heard you were in the North. Funny that we've had so much to do with each other indirectly and have never met. . . . You've been having a long walk? Well, I know what you need. Cold tea for you. We'll leave the ladies to their gossip and have a whiskey-and-soda in the library. I've just had a letter from Dickinson on which I'd like your views. Busy folk like you and me can never make a clean cut of their holiday. There's always something clawing us back to the mill.'

The two men were led off to the library, and Janet was left to entertain her hostess. That lady was in an expansive mood, which may have been due to the restoration of Roguie, but also owed something to the visit of Palliser-Yeates. 'My heart is buried here,' she told the girl. 'Every day I love Haripol more — its beauty and its poetry and its — its wonderful traditions. My dream is to make it a centre for all the nicest people to come and rest. Everybody comes to the Highlands now, and we have so much to offer them here. . . . Claybody, I may as well admit, is apt to be restless when we are alone. He is not enough of a sportsman to be happy shooting and fishing all day and every day. He has a wonderful mind, my dear, and he wants a chance of exercising it. He needs to be stimulated. Look how his eye brightened when he saw Mr. Palliser-Yeates. . . . And then, there are the girls. . . . I'm sure you see what I mean.'

Janet saw, and set herself to cherish the innocent ambition of her hostess. In view of what might befall at any

moment, it was most needful to have the Claybodys in a good humour. Then Lady Claybody, one of whose virtues was a love of fresh air, proposed that they should walk in the gardens. Janet would have preferred to remain in the house, had she been able to think of any kind of excuse, for the out-of-doors at the moment was filled with the most explosive material. Benjie, Mackenzie, an assortment of fugitive journalists, and Leithen and Lamanha somewhere in the hinterland. But she assented with a good grace, and, accompanied by Roguie, who after a morning of liberty had cast the part of lapdog contemptuously behind him, they sauntered into the trim parterres.

The head gardener at Haripol was a man of the old school. He loved fantastically shaped beds and geometrical patterns, and geraniums and lobelias and calceolarias were still dear to his antiquated soul. On the lawns he had been given his head, but Lady Claybody, who had accepted new fashions in horticulture as in other things, had constructed a pleasaunce of her own, which with crazy paving and sundials and broad borders was a very fair imitation of an old English garden. She had a lily pond and a roserie, and many pergolas, and what promised in twenty years to be a fine yew walk. The primitive walled garden, planted in the Scots fashion a long way from the house, was now relegated to fruit and vegetables.

Lady Claybody was an inaccurate enthusiast. She poured into Janet's ears a flow of botanical information and mispronounced Latin names. Each innovation was modelled on what she had seen or heard of in some famous country house. The girl approved, for in that glen the

environment of hill and wood was so masterful that the artifices of man were instantly absorbed. The gardens exhausted, they wandered through the rhododendron thickets, which in early summer were towers of flame, crossed the turbid Reascuill by a rustic bridge, and found themselves in a walk which skirted the stream through a pleasant wilderness. Here an expert from Kew had been turned loose, and had made a wonderful wild garden, in which patches of red-hot poker and godetia and *hyacinthus candicans* shone against the darker carpet of the heather. Roguie led the way, and where Roguie's yelps beckoned his mistress followed. Soon the two were nearly a mile from the house, approaching the portals of the Reascuill glen.

Sir Edward Leithen left Crask just as the wet dawn was breaking. He had a very long walk before him, but at that he was not dismayed: what perplexed him was how it was going to end. To the first part, a struggle with wind and rain and many moorland miles, he looked forward with enthusiasm. Long, lonely expeditions had always been his habit, for he was the kind of man who could be happy with his own thoughts. Before it became the fashion he had been a pioneer in guideless climbing in the Alps, and the red-letter days in his memory were for the most part solitary days. He was always in hard condition, and his lean figure rarely knew fatigue; weather he minded little, and he had long ago taught himself how to find his road, even in mist with map and compass.

So it was with sincere enjoyment that his legs covered the rough miles — along the Crask ridge till it curved round at the head of the Doran and led him to the eastern

skirts of Sgurr Dearg. He knew from the map that the great eastern precipice of that mountain was towering above him, but he saw only the white wall of fog a dozen yards off. His aim was to make a circuit of the *massif* and bear round to the pass of the Red Burn, which made a road between Haripol and Machray. He would then be nearly due north of the sanctuary and exactly opposite where Lamancha proposed to make his entrance. . . . A fortnight earlier, when he first came to Crask, he had gone for a walk in far pleasanter weather, and had been acutely bored. Now, with no prospect but a wet blanket of mist, and with no chance of observing bird or plant, he was enjoying every moment of it. More, his thoughts were beginning to turn pleasantly towards the other side of his life — his books and hobbies, the intricacies of politics, the legal practice of which he was a master. He reflected almost with exhilaration on a difficult appeal which would come on in the autumn, when he hoped to induce the House of Lords to upset a famous judgment. He had begun to relish his competence again, even to take a modest pride in his fame; what had been dust and ashes in his mouth a few weeks ago had now an agreeable flavour. Palliser-Yeates was of the same way of thinking. Had he not declared last night that he wanted to give orders again and be addressed as ‘sir,’ instead of being chivvied about the countryside? And Lamancha? Leithen seriously doubted if Lamancha had ever suffered from quite the same malady. The trouble with him was that he had always a large streak of bandit in his composition, and must now and then give it play. That was what made him the bigger man, perhaps. Charles might take an almighty toss some day, but if he did not he

would be first at the post, for he rode more gallantly to win.

'I suppose I may regard myself as cured,' Leithen reflected, as he munched a second breakfast of cheese sandwiches and raisins somewhere under the northeastern spur of Sgurr Dearg. But he reflected, too, that he had a horribly difficult day ahead of him, for which he felt a strong distaste. He realised the shrewdness of Acton Croke's diagnosis: he was longing once more for the flesh-pots of the conventional.

His orders had been to get somewhere on the Machray side by eight o'clock, and he saw by his watch that he was ahead of his time. Once he had turned the corner of Sgurr Dearg the wind was shut off and the mist wrapped him closer. He had acquired long ago a fast but regular pace on the hills, and, judging from the time and the known distance, he knew that he must now be very near the Machray march. Presently he had topped a ridge which was clearly a watershed, for the plentiful waters now ran west. Then he began to descend, and soon was brought up by a raging torrent which seemed to be flowing northwest. This must be the Red Burn, coming down from the gullies of Sgurr Dearg, and it was his business to cross it and work his way westward along the edge of the great trough of the Reascuill. But he must go warily, for he was very near the pass, by which according to the map, a road could be found from Corrie Easain in the Machray Forest to the Haripol Sanctuary — the road which, according to Wattie Lithgow, gave the easiest access and would most assuredly be well watched.

He crossed the stream, not without difficulty, and climbed another ridge, beyond which the ground fell

steeply. These must be the screes on the Reascuill side, he concluded, so he bore to the right and found, as he expected, that here there was a re-entrant corrie, and that he was on the very edge of the great trough. It was for him now to keep this edge, but to go circumspectly, for at any moment he might stumble upon some of Claybody's sentries. His business was to occupy their attention, but he did not see what good he could do. The mist was distraction enough, for in it no man could see twenty yards ahead of him. But it might clear, and in that case he would have his work cut out for him. Meanwhile he must avoid a premature collision.

He avoided it only by a hair's breadth. Suddenly that happened which at the moment was perplexing Wattie Lithgow and Lamancha a mile off. Corridors opened in the air — dark corridors of dizzy space and black rock seamed with torrents. Leithen found himself looking into a cauldron of which only the bottom was still hid, and at the savage splinters of the Pinnacle Ridge. He was looking at something less welcome, for thirty yards off, on the edge of the scarp, was a group of five men.

They had been boiling tea in billies in the lee of a rock and had been stirred to attention by the sudden clearing of the air. They saw him as soon as he saw them, and in a moment were on their feet and spreading out in his direction. He heard a cry, and then a babble of tongues.

Leithen did the only thing possible. He strode towards them with a masterful air. They were the real navvy, the hardest race in the land, sleeping in drain-pipes, always dirty and wet, forgetting their sodden labours now and then in drink, but tough, formidable, and resourceful.

‘What the devil are you fellows doing here?’ he shouted angrily.

At first they took him for a gillie.

‘What the hell’s your business?’ one of them replied, but the advance had halted. As he came nearer, they changed their minds, for Leithen had not the air of a gillie.

‘My business is to know what you’re doing here — on my land?’

Now Machray Forest was not let that season, and this Leithen knew. If any arrangement had been come to with Haripol, it could only have been made between the stalkers. It was for him to play the part of the owner.

The men looked nonplussed, for the navvy, working under heavy-handed foremen, is susceptible to the voice of authority.

‘We were sent up here to keep a lookout,’ one answered.

‘Lookout for what? Who sent you?’

‘It was Lord Claybody — we took our orders from Mr. Macnicol.’

Leithen sat down on a stone and lit his pipe.

‘Well, you’re trespassing on Machray — my ground. I don’t know what on earth Lord Claybody means. I have heard nothing of it.’

‘There’s a man tryin’ to poach, sir. We were telled to wait here and keep a lookout for him.’

Leithen smiled grimly. ‘A pretty lookout you can keep in this weather. But that doesn’t touch the point that you’re in a place where you’ve no right to be . . . You poor devils must have been having a rotten time roosting up here.’

He took out his flask.

‘Here’s something to warm you. There’s just enough for a tot apiece.’

The flask was passed round amid murmurs of satisfaction, while Leithen smoked his pipe and surveyed the queer party.

‘I call it cruelty to animals,’ he said, ‘to plant you fellows in a place like this. I hope you’re well paid for it.’

‘We’re gettin’ a pund a day, and the man that grips the poacher gets a five-pund note. The name o’ the poacher is Macnab.’

‘Well, I hope one of you will earn the fiver. Now look here. I can’t have you moving a yard north of this. You’re on Machray ground as it is, for my march is the edge of the hill. I don’t mind you squatting here, and of course it’s no business of mine what you do on Haripol, but you don’t stir a foot into Machray. With this wind you’ll put all the beasts out of these upper corries.’

He rose and strolled away. ‘I must be off. See that you mind what I’ve said. If you move, it must be into Haripol. A poacher! I never heard such rubbish. Better my job than yours, anyway. Still, I hope you get that fiver!’

Leithen departed in an atmosphere of general good-will, and as soon as possible put a ridge between himself and the navvies. It had been a narrow escape, but mercifully no harm was done. He must keep well below the skyline on the Machray side, for there would be watchers elsewhere on the Haripol ground and he was not ready as yet to play the decoy-duck. For it had occurred to him that he was still too far east for his purpose. Those navvies were watching the pass from the Red Burn, and had no concern with what might be happening in the sanctuary.

Indeed, they could not see into it because of the spur which Sgurr Dearg flung out towards the Reascuill. He must be farther down the stream before he tried to interest those who might interfere with Lamancha; so he mended his pace, and, keeping well on the Machray side, made for the hill called Bheinn Fhada, which faced Sgurr Mor across the Reascuill.

Then the mist came down again, and in driving sleet Leithen scrambled among the matted boulders and screes of Bheinn Fhada's slopes. Here he knew he was safe enough, for he was inside the Machray march and out of any possible prospect from the Reascuill. But it was a useless labour, and the return of the thick weather began to try his temper. The good-humour of the morning had gone, when it was a delight to be abroad in the wilds alone and to pit his strength against storm and distance. He was growing bored with the whole business and at the same time anxious to play the part which had been set him. As it was, wandering on the skirts of Bheinn Fhada, he was as little use to John Macnab as if he had been reading Sir Walter Scott in the Crask smoking-room.

It took him longer than he expected to pass that weariful mountain, and it was noon before he ate the remnants of the food he had brought in the hollow which lies at the head of the second main Machray corrie, Corrie na Sidhe. Here he observed that sight which at the same moment was perturbing Lamancha on the Beallach looking over to Crask. The mist was thinning — not breaking into gloomy corridors, but lightening everywhere with the sun behind it. The wind, too, had shifted; it was blowing in his face from the south. Suddenly the top of Stob Coire Easain in front of him stood clear and bright, and its

upper crags, jewelled with falling waters, rose out of a rainbow haze. Far out on the right he saw a patch of silver which he knew for the sea. Nearer, and far below was an olive-green splash which must be the Haripol woods. And then, as if under a wizard's wand, the glen below him, from a pit of vapour, became an enamelled cup, with the tawny Reascuill looped in its hollows.

It was time for Leithen to be up and doing. He crawled to a point which gave him cover and a view into the glen, and searched the place long and carefully with his glasses. There must be navy posts close at hand, but from where he lay he could not command the sinuosities of the hillside below him. He saw the nest of upper corries which composed the sanctuary, but not the Beallach, which was hidden by the ridge of Sgurr Mor. . . . He lay there for half an hour, uncertain what he should do next. If he descended into the glen it meant certain capture, for he would be cut off by some lower post. The only plan seemed to be to show himself on the upper slopes and then try to draw the pursuit off towards Machray, but he did not see how such a course was going to help Lamancha in the sanctuary. The plan of campaign, he decided, had been a great deal too elaborate, and his part looked like a wash-out.

He made his way along the hillside towards the Machray peak which bore the name of Clonlet and the wide skirts of which made one side of the glen above Haripol, the opposite sentinel to Stob Ban. He had got well on to the slopes of that mountain when he detected something in the glen below. Men seemed to be moving down the stream — three at least — and to be moving fast. His sense of duty revived, for here seemed a task to his hand.

... He showed himself on an out-jutting knoll and waited. The men below had their eyes about them, for he was almost instantly observed. He heard cries, he saw a hand waved, then he heard a whistle blown. ... After that he began to run.

At this point the chronicler must retrace his steps and follow the doings of Mr. Johnson Claybody. That young gentleman had taken the threat of John Macnab most seriously to heart: he felt his honour involved, his sense of propriety outraged, and he saw the pride of the Claybodys lowered if the scoundrel was victorious on Haripol as he had been at Strathlarrig. Above all he feared the press, which was making a holiday feature of this monstrous insolence. He it was who had devised the plan of defence — a plan which did credit to his wits. Not only had he placed his sentries with care, but he had arranged for peripatetic gillies to patrol between the stations, and form an intelligence service for headquarters. His *poste de commandement* was at Macnicol's cottage just beyond the gorge of the Reascuill and some two miles from the house.

All morning his temper had been worsening. The news of the journalistic invasion of Haripol, brought to him about ten o'clock by a heated garden-boy, had been the first shock. He had sent a message to his father, handing over to him that problem, with the results which we have seen. Also he was lamentably short of the force he had hoped to muster, owing to his mother's insistence on keeping Macnicol and two of the gillies behind to look for her dog. It was not till close on midday that, after a furious journey to the house in a two-seater car, he was

able to recover the services of the head stalker. Macnicol, he felt, should have been on the edge of the sanctuary at daybreak; instead he had had to send Macqueen, a surly ruffian whom he had dismissed for insolence, but whose hill-craft he knew to be of the first order. Johnson's plan was that towards midday he himself, with a posse, should patrol the upper forest, so that, if John Macnab should be lurking there, he might drive him north or south against the navvy garrison. East, Sgurr Dearg shut the way, and west lay the grounds of Haripol, where escape would be impossible, since every living thing there was on the watch. Johnson's blood was up. If John Macnab had made his venture, he wanted to share directly in the chase and to be in at the death.

It was after midday before the flying column started. It was composed of Macnicol, Cameron the third stalker, two selected gillies, and three of the navvies who were more mobile than their fellows. Macnicol had prophesied that the weather would clear in the afternoon, so, though the mist was thick at the start, they took the road with confidence. Sure enough, it began to lift before they were half a mile up the glen, and Macnicol grunted his satisfaction.

'Macnab cannot escape, noways,' he said. 'But I do not think he has come at all, unless he's daft. He would not get in, but, if he is in, he will never get out.'

Johnson's one fear now was that the assault might not have been made. It would be a poor ending to his strategy if the pool were dragged and no fish were found in it. But presently he was reassured, for at the foot of Bheinn Fhada he met one of the patrolling gillies with tremendous news. A man had been seen that morning by the

navvies at the Red Burn. He had passed as the Laird of Machray, and had given them whiskey. The gillie knew that the Laird of Machray was a child of three dwelling at Bournemouth, and he had demanded a description of the visitor. It was a tallish man, they said, lean and clean-shaven, rather pale, and with his skin very tight over his cheek-bones. He had looked like a gentleman and had behaved as such. Now the only picture of John Macnab known to the gillies was that which had been broadcast in talk by Angus and Jimsie of Strathlarrig, and that agreed most startlingly with the navvies' account. 'A long, lean dog,' Angus had said, 'and whitish in the face.' Wherefore the gillie had hastened with his tidings to headquarters.

The news increased Johnson's pace. John Macnab was veritably in the forest, and at the thought he grew both nervous and wroth. There was something supernatural, he felt, about the impudence of a man who could march quietly up to a post of navvies and bluff them. Were all his subtle plans to be foiled? Then, half a mile on, appeared Macqueen, just descended from his eyrie.

Macqueen had to report that half an hour before, when the mist cleared and he could get a view of the corries, he had seen the deer moving. The wind at the same time had shifted to the south, and the beasts in the corrie below the Beallach were frightened. He had seen nothing with his telescope — the beasts had been moved some time before, he thought, for they were well down the hill. In his opinion, if John Macnab was in the forest he was on or beyond the Beallach.

Johnson considered furiously. 'The fellow was at the Red Burn just before nine o'clock. He must have gone

through the sanctuary to be at the Beallach half an hour ago. Is that possible, Macnicol?’

‘I don’t ken.’ Macnicol scratched his head. ‘Macqueen says that only the beasts in the corrie below the Beallach were moved, but if he had gone through the sanctuary they would have been all rinnin’ oot. I’m fair puzzled, sir, unless he cam’ down the water and worked up by Sgurr Mor. That Macnab’s a fair deevil.’

‘We’ll get after him,’ said Johnson, and then he stopped short. He had a sudden memory of what had happened at Glenraden. Why should not John Macnab have sent a confederate to gull them into the belief that he was busy in the sanctuary, while he himself killed a stag in the woods around the house? There were plenty of beasts there, and it would be like his infernal insolence to poach one under the very windows of Haripol. It was true that the woodland stags were not easy to stalk, but Macnab had shown himself a mighty artist.

Johnson had a gift of quick decision. He briefly explained to his followers his suspicions. ‘The man at the Beallach may not be the man whom the navvies saw at the Red Burn. The Red Burn fellow may have gone down the Machray side, and be now in the woods. . . . Cameron, you take Andrew and Peter, and get down the glen in double-quick time. If you see anybody on Clonlet or in the woods, hunt him like hell. I’ll skin you if you let him escape. Drive him right down to the gardens, and send word to the men there to be on the lookout. You’ll be a dozen against one. Macnicol, you come with me, and you, Macqueen, and you three fellows, and we’ll make for the Beallach. We’ll cut up through the sanctuary, for it don’t matter a damn about the deer if we only catch that

swine. He's probably lying up there till he can slip out in the darkness. . . . And, Cameron, tell them to send a car up the Doran road. I may want a lift home.'

It was Cameron and his posse who spied Leithen on the side of Clonlet. All three were young men, and they had the priceless advantage of acquaintance with the ground, while Leithen knew no more than the generalities of the map. As soon as he saw that he was pursued, he turned uphill with the purpose of making for Machray. He had had a long walk, but he felt fresh enough for another dozen miles or so, and he remembered his instructions to go north, if necessary, even into Glенаicill.

But in this he had badly miscalculated. For the whistle of Cameron had alarmed a post of navvies in a nook of hill behind Leithen and at a greater altitude, who had missed him earlier for the simple reason that they had been asleep. Roused now to a sudden attention, they fanned out on the slope, and cut him off effectively from any retreat towards Corrie na Sidhe. There were only two courses open to him — to climb the steep face of Clonlet or to go west towards the woods. The first would be hard, he did not even know whether the rock was climbable, and if he stuck there he would be an easy prey. He must go west, and trust to find some way to Machray round the far skirts of the mountain.

Cameron did not hurry, for he knew what would happen. So long as the navvies cut off retreat to the east, the victim was safe. Leithen did not realise his danger till he found himself above the woods on a broad grassy ledge just under the sheer rocks of Clonlet. It was the place called Craig Crapnagower, which ended, not in a hillside

by which the butt of Clonlet could be turned, but in a bold promontory of rock which fell almost sheer to the meadows of Haripol. Long before he got to the edge he had an uncomfortable suspicion of what was coming, but when he peered over the brink and saw cattle at grass far below him, he had an ugly shock. It looked as if he was cornered, and cornered, too, in a place far from the main scene of action, where his misfortunes could not benefit Lamancha.

He turned and plunged downward through the woods direct for Haripol. There was still plenty of fight in him, and his pursuers would have a run for their money. These pursuers were not far off. Andrew had climbed the hill and had been moving fast parallel to Leithen, but farther down among the trees. Cameron was on the lower road, a grassy aisle among the thickets, and Peter, the swifter, had gone on ahead to watch the farther slopes. It was not long before Leithen was made aware of Andrew, and the sight forced him to his right in a long slant which would certainly have taken him into the arms of Peter.

But at this moment the Fates intervened in the person of Crossby.

That eminent correspondent, having inspired his fellow journalists with the spirit of all mischief and thereby sadly broken the peace of Haripol, was now lying up from further pursuit in the woods, confident that he had done his best for the cause. Suddenly he became aware of the ex-Attorney-General descending the hill in leaps and bounds, and a gillie not fifty yards behind on his trail. . . . Crossby behaved like Sir Philip Sidney and other cavaliers in similar crises. 'Thy need is the greater,' was his motto, and as Leithen passed he shouted hoarsely to him to get

into cover. Leithen, whose head was clear enough though his legs were aching, both heard and saw. He clapped down like a woodcock in a patch of bracken, while Crossby, whose garb and height were much the same as his, became the quarry in his stead.

The chase was not of long duration. The correspondent did not know the ground, nor did he know of the waiting Peter. Left to himself, he might have outdistanced Andrew, but he was watched from below by wily eyes. He reached the grassy path, turned to his right, and rounded a corner, to be embraced firmly and affectionately by the long arms of the gillie. 'That's five pund in our pockets, Andra, ma man,' the latter observed when the second gillie arrived. 'If this is no John Macnab, it's his brither and anyway we've done what we were telled.' So, strongly held by the two men, the self-sacrificing Crossby departed into captivity.

Of these doings Leithen knew nothing. He did not believe that Crossby could escape, but the hunt had gone out of his ken. Now it is the nature of man that, once he is in flight, he cannot be content till he finds an indisputable place of refuge. This wood was obviously unhealthy, and he made haste to get out of it. But he must go circumspectly, and the first need was for thicker cover, for this upper part was too open for his comfort. Below he saw denser scrub, and he started to make his way to it.

The trouble was that presently he came into Cameron's view. The stalker had heard the crash of Crossby's pursuit, and had not hurried himself, knowing the strategic value of Peter's position. He proposed to wait, in case the fugitive doubled back. Suddenly he caught sight of

Leithen farther up the hill, and apparently unfollowed. Had the man given the two gillies the slip? . . . Cameron performed a very creditable piece of stalking. He wormed his way uphill till he was above the bushes where Leithen was now sheltering. The next thing that much-enduring gentleman knew was that a large hand had been outstretched to grip his collar.

Like a stag from covert Leithen leaped forth, upsetting Cameron with his sudden bound. He broke through the tangle of hazel and wild raspberries, and stayed not on the order of his going. His pace downhill had always been remarkable and Cameron's was no match for it. Soon he had gained twenty yards, then fifty, but he had no comfort in his speed, for somewhere ahead were more gillies, and he was being forced straight on Haripol, which was thick with the enemy.

The only plan in his head was to make for the Reascuill, which as he was aware flowed at this part of its course in a deep-cut gorge. He had a faint hope that, once there, he might find a place to lie up in till the darkness, for he knew that the Highland gillie is rarely a rock-climber. But the place grew more horrible as he continued. He was among rhododendrons now, and well-tended grass walks. Yes, there was a rustic arbour and what looked like a summer-seat. The beastly place was a garden. In another minute he would be among flower-pots and vine-ries with twenty gardeners at his heels. But the river was below — he could hear its sound — so, like a stag hard-pressed by hounds, he made for the running water. A long slither took him down a steep bank of what had once been foxgloves, and he found his feet on a path.

And there to his horror were two women.

By this time his admirable wind was considerably touched, and the sweat was blinding his eyes, so that he did not see clearly. But surely one of the two was known to him.

Janet rose to the occasion like a bird. As he stood blinking before her, she laughed merrily:

‘Sir Edward,’ she cried, ‘where in the world have you been? You’ve taken a very rough road.’ Then she turned to Lady Claybody. ‘This is Sir Edward Leithen. He is staying with us and went out for an enormous walk this morning. He is always doing it. It was lucky you came this way, Sir Edward, for we can give you a lift home.’

Lady Claybody was delighted, she said, to meet one of whom she had heard so much. He must come back to the house at once and have tea and see her husband. ‘I call this a real romance,’ she cried. ‘First Mr. Palliser-Yeates — and then Sir Edward Leithen dropping like a stone from the hillside.’

Leithen was beginning to recover himself. ‘I’m afraid I was trespassing,’ he murmured. ‘I tried a short cut and got into difficulties. I hope I didn’t alarm you coming down that hill like an avalanche. I find that the easiest way.’

The mystified Cameron stood speechless, watching his prey vanishing in the company of his mistress.

CHAPTER XIV

HARIPOL — WOUNDED AND MISSING

LAMANCHA watched Palliser-Yeates disappear along the hillside, and then returned to the hollow top of the Bealach, which was completely cut off from view on either side. All that was now left of the mist was a fleeting vapour twining in scarves on the highest peaks and the cliffs of Sgurr Dearg and Sgurr Mor towered above him in gleaming stairways. The drenched cloudberry sparkled in the sunlight, and the thousand little rivulets, which in the gloom had been hoarse with menace, made now a pleasant music. Lamancha's spirits rose as the world brightened. He proposed to wait for a quarter of an hour till Wattie with the stag was well down the ravine and Palliser-Yeates had secured the earnest attention of the navvies. Then he would join Wattie and help him with the beast, and within a couple of hours he might be wallowing in a bath at Crask, having bidden John Macnab a long farewell.

Meantime he was thirsty, and laid himself on the ground for a long drink at an icy spring, leaving his rifle on a bank of heather.

When he rose with his eyes dim with water he had an unpleasing surprise. A man stood before him, having in his hands his rifle, which he pointed threateningly at the rifle's owner.

“'Ands up,” the man shouted. He was a tall fellow in navy's clothes, with a shock head of black hair, and a week's beard — an uncouth figure with a truculent eye.

'Put that down,' said Lamancha. 'You fool, it's not loaded, hand it over. Quick!'

For answer the man swung it like a cudgel.

'Ands up,' he repeated. 'Ands up, you ——, or I'll do you in.'

By this time Lamancha had realised that his opponent was the peripatetic navvy, whom Palliser-Yeates had reported. An ugly customer he looked, and resolute to earn Claybody's promised reward.

'What do you want?' he asked. 'You're behaving like a lunatic.'

'I want you to 'ands up and come along o' me.'

'Who on earth do you take me for?'

'You're the poacher — Macnab. I seen you, and I seen the old fellow and the stag. You're Macnab, I reckon, and you're the —— I'm after. Up with your 'ands and look sharp.'

Mendacity was obviously out of the question, so Lamancha tried conciliation.

'Supposing I am Macnab — let's talk a little sense. You're being paid for this job, and the man who catches me is to have something substantial. Well, whatever Lord Claybody has promised you I'll double it if you let me go.'

The man stared for a second without answering, and then his face crimsoned. But it was not with avarice, but with wrath.

'No, you don't,' he cried. 'By —— you don't come over me that way. I'm not the kind as sells his boss. I'm a white man I am, and I'll —— well, let you see it. 'Ands up, you —— and march. I've a —— good mind to smash your 'ead for tryin' to buy me.'

Lamancha looked at the fellow, his shambling figure contorted by hard toil out of its natural balance; his thin face; his hot, honest eyes, and suddenly felt ashamed. 'I beg your pardon,' he grunted. 'I oughtn't to have said that. I had no right to insult you. But of course I refuse to surrender. You've got to catch me.'

He followed his words by a dive to his right, hoping to get between the man and the Sgurr Mor cliffs. But the navvy was too quick for him, and he had to retreat baffled.

Lamancha was beginning to realise that the situation was really awkward. This fellow was both active and resolved; even if he gave him the slip, he would be pursued down to the Doran, and the destination of the stag would be revealed. . . . But he was by no means sure that he could give him the slip. He was already tired and cramped, and he had never been noted for his speed like Leithen and Palliser-Yeates. . . . He thought of another way, for in his time he had been a fair amateur middle-weight.

'You're an Englishman. What about settling the business with our fists? Put the rifle down, and we'll stand up together.'

The man spat sarcastically.

'Ain't it likely?' he sneered. 'Thank you kindly, but I'm takin' no risks this trip. You've got to 'ands up and let me tie 'em so as you're safe, and then come along peaceable. If you don't I'll 'it you as 'ard as Gawd'll let me.'

There seemed to be nothing for it but a scrap, and Lamancha, with a wary eye on the clubbed rifle, waited for his chance. He must settle this fellow so that he

should be incapable of pursuit — a nice task for a respectable Cabinet Minister getting on in life. There was a pool beside his left foot, which was the source of one of the burns that ran down into the sanctuary. Getting this between him and his adversary, he darted towards one end, checked, turned, and made to go round the other. The navy struck at him with the rifle and narrowly missed his head. Then he dropped the weapon, made a wild clutch, gripped Lamancha by the coat, and with a sound of rending tweed dragged him to his arms. The next moment the two men were locked in a very desperate and unscientific wrestling bout.

It was a game Lamancha had never played in his life before. He was a useful boxer in his way, but of wrestling he was utterly ignorant, and so, happily, was the navy. So it became a mere contest of brute strength, waged on difficult ground with boulders, wells, and bog-holes adjacent. Lamancha had an athletic, well-trained body, the navy was powerful but ill-trained; Lamancha was tired with eight or nine hours' scrambling, his opponent had also had a wearing morning; but Lamancha had led a regular and comfortable life, while the navy had often gone supperless and had drunk many gallons of bad whiskey. Consequently the latter, though the heavier and more powerful man, was likely to fail first in a match of endurance.

At the start, indeed, he nearly won straightaway by the vigour of his attack. Lamancha cried out with pain as he felt his arm bent almost to breaking-point and a savage knee in his groin. The first three minutes it was any one's fight; the second three Lamancha began to feel a dawning assurance. The other's breath laboured, and

his sudden spasms of furious effort grew shorter and easier to baffle. He strove to get his opponent on to the rougher ground, while that opponent manœuvred to keep the fight on the patch of grass, for it was obvious to him that his right course was to wear the navvy down. There were no rules in this game, and it would be of little use to throw him; only by reducing him to the last physical fatigue could he have him at his mercy, and be able to make his own terms.

Presently the early fury of the man was exchanged for a sullen defence. Lamancha was getting very distressed himself, for the navvy's great boots had damaged his shins and torn away strips of stocking and skin, while his breath was growing deplorably short. The two staggered around the patch of grass, never changing grips, but locked in a dull clinch into which they seemed to have been frozen. Lamancha would fain have broken free and tried other methods, but the navvy's great hands held him like a vice, and it seemed as if their power, in spite of the man's gasping, would never weaken.

In this preposterous stalemate they continued for the better part of ten minutes. Then the navvy, as soldiers say, resumed the initiative. He must have felt his strength ebbing, and in a moment of violent disquiet have decided to hazard everything. Suddenly Lamancha found himself forced away from the chosen ground and dragged into the neighbouring moraine. They shaved the pool, and in a second were stumbling among slabs and scree and concealed boulders. The man's object was plain: if he could make his lighter antagonist slip, he might force him down in a place from which it would not be easy to rise.

But it was the navvy who slipped. He lurched backward, tripping over a stone, and the two rolled into a cavity formed by a boulder which had been split by its fall from Sgurr Mor in some bygone storm. It was three or four feet of a fall, and Lamancha fell with him. There was a cry from the navvy, and the grip of his arms slackened.

Lamancha scrambled out and looked back into the hole where the man lay bunched up as if in pain.

'Hurt?' he asked, and the answer came back, garnished with much profanity, that it was his —— leg.

'I'm dashed sorry. Look here, this fight is off. Let me get you out and see what I can do for you.'

The man, sullen but quiescent, allowed himself to be pulled out and laid on a couch of heather. Lamancha had feared for the thigh or the pelvis and was relieved to find that it was a clear break below the knee, caused by the owner's descent, weighted by his antagonist, on an ugly, sharp-edged stone. But as he looked at the limp figure, haggard with toil and poor living, and realised that he had damaged it in the pitiful capital which was all it possessed, its bodily strength, he suffered from a pang of sharp compunction. He loathed John Macnab and all his works for bringing disaster upon a poor devil who had to earn his bread.

'I'm most awfully sorry,' he stammered. 'I wouldn't have had this happen for a thousand pounds. . . .' Then he broke off, for in the face now solemnly staring at him he recognised something familiar. Where had he seen that long crooked nose before and that cock of the eyebrows?

'Stokes,' he cried, 'you're Stokes, aren't you?' He

recalled now the man who had once been his orderly, and whom he had last known as a smart troop sergeant.

The navy tried to rise and failed. 'You've got my name right, Guv'nor,' he said, but it was obvious that in his eyes there was no recognition.

'You remember me, Lord Lamancha?' He had it all now — the fellow who had been a son of one of Tommy Deloraine's keepers — a decent fellow and a humorous, and a good soldier. It was like the cussedness of things that he should go breaking the leg of a friend.

'Gawd!' gasped the navy, peering at the shameful figure of Lamancha, whose nether garments were now well advanced in raggedness and whose peat-begrimed face had taken on an added dirtiness from the heat of the contest. 'I can't 'ardly believe it's you, sir.' Then, with many tropes of speech, he explained what, had he known, would have happened to Lord Claybody, before he interfered with the game of a gentleman as he had served under.

'What brought you to this?' Lamancha asked.

'I've 'ad a lot of bad luck, sir. Nothing seemed to go right with me after the War. I found the missus 'ad done a bunk, and I 'ad the two kids on my 'ands, and there weren't no cushy jobs goin' for the likes of me. Gentlemen everywhere was puttin' down their 'osses, and I 'ad to take what I could get. So it come to the navyin' with me, like lots of other chaps. The Gov'ment don't seem to care what 'appens to us poor Gawd-forgotten devils, sir.'

The navy stopped to cough, and Lamancha did not like the sound of it.

'How's your health?' he asked.

'Not so bad, barrin' a bit of 'oarseness.'

‘That explains a lot. You’ll have consumption if you don’t look out. If you had been the man you were five years ago you’d have had me on my back in two seconds. . . . I needn’t tell you, Stokes, that I’m dashed sorry about this, and I’ll do all I can to make it up to you. First, we must get that leg right.’

Lamancha began by retrieving the rifle. It was a light double-barrelled express which fortunately could be taken to pieces. He had some slight surgical knowledge, and was able to set the limb, and then with strips of his handkerchief and the rifle-barrel to put it roughly into a splint. Stokes appeared to have gone without breakfast, so he was given the few sandwiches which remained in Lamancha’s pocket and a stiff dram from his flask. Soon the patient was reclining in comparative comfort on the heather, smoking Lamancha’s tobacco in an ancient stump of a pipe, while the latter, with heavy brows, considered the situation.

‘You ought to get to bed at once, for you’ve a devil of a bad cough, you know. And you ought to have a doctor to look after that leg properly, for this contraption of mine is a bit rough. The question is, How am I going to get you down? You can’t walk, and you’re too much of a heavy-weight for me to carry very far. Also I needn’t tell you that this hillside is not too healthy for me at present. I meant to go down it by crawling in the open and keeping to the gullies, but I can’t very well do that with you. . . . It looks as if there was nothing for it but to wait here till dark. Then I’ll nip over to Crask and send some men here with a stretcher.’

Mr. Stokes declared that he was perfectly happy where he was, and deprecated the trouble he was giving.

'Trouble!' cried Lamancha. 'I caused the trouble, and I'm going to see you through it.'

'But you'll get nabbed, sir, and there ain't no bloomin' good in my 'avin' my leg broke if Claybody's going to nab you along of it. You cut off, sir, and never 'eed me.'

'I don't want to be nabbed, but I can't leave you. . . . Wait a minute! If I followed Wattie — that is my stalker — down to the Doran, I could send a message to Crask about a stretcher and men to carry it. I might get some food too. And then I'll come back here, and we'll *bukk* about Palestine till it's time to go. . . . It might be the best way. . . .'

But, even as he spoke, further plans were put out of the question by the advent of six men who had come quietly through the Beallach from the sanctuary, and had unostentatiously taken up positions in a circle around the two ex-antagonists. Lamancha had been so engaged in Stokes's affairs that he had ceased to remember that he was in enemy territory.

His military service had taught him the value of the offensive. The newcomers were, he observed, three navvies, two men who were clearly gillies, and a warm and breathless young man in a suit of a dapperness startling on a wild mountain. This young man was advancing towards him with a determined eye when Lamancha arose from his couch and confronted him.

'Hullo!' he cried cheerfully, 'you've come just in time. This poor chap here has had a smash — broken his leg — and I was wondering how I was to get him down the hill.'

Johnson Claybody stopped short. He had rarely seen a more disreputable figure than that which had risen from

the heather — dissolute in garments, wild of hair, muddy beyond belief in countenance. Yet these dilapidated clothes had once, very long ago, been made by a good tailor, and the fellow was apparently some kind of a gentleman. He was John Macnab beyond doubt, for in his hand was the butt-end of a rifle. Now Johnson was the type of man who is miserable if he feels himself ill-clad or dirty, and discovers in a sense of tidiness a moral superiority. He rejoiced to have found his enemy, and an enemy over whom he felt at a notable advantage. But, unfortunately for him, no Merkland had ever been conscious of the appearance he represented or cared a straw about it. Lamancha in rags would have cheerfully disputed with an emperor in scarlet, and suffered no loss of confidence because of his garb, since he would not have given it a thought. What he was considering at the moment was the future of the damaged Stokes.

‘Who’s that?’ Johnson asked magisterially, pointing to the navvy.

His colleagues hastened to inform him. ‘It’s Jim Stokes,’ one of the three navvies volunteered. ‘What ’ave you been doing to yourself, Jim?’ And Macnicol added: ‘That’s the man that was to keep movin’ along this side o’ the hill, sir. I picked him, for he looked the sooplest.’

Then the faithful Stokes uplifted his voice. ‘I done as I was told, sir, and kep’ movin’ all right, but I ain’t seen nothing, and then I ’ad a nawsty fall among them blasted rocks and ’urt my leg. This gentleman comes along and finds me and ’as a try at patchin’ me up. But for ’im, sir, I’d be lyin’ jammed between two rocks till the crows ’ad a pick at me.’

'You're a good chap, Stokes,' said Lamancha, 'but you're a liar. This man,' he addressed Johnson, 'was carrying out your orders, and challenged me. I wanted to pass and he wouldn't let me, so we had a rough-and-tumble, and through no fault of his he took a toss into a hole and, as you see, broke his leg. I've set it and bound it up, but the sooner we get the job properly done the better. Hang it, it's the poor devil's livelihood. So we'd better push along.'

His tone irritated Johnson. This scoundrelly poacher, caught red-handed with a rifle, presumed to give orders to his own men. He turned fiercely on Stokes.

'You know this fellow? What's his name?'

'I can't say as I rightly knows 'im,' was the answer. 'But 'im and me was in the War, and he once gave me a drink outside Jerusalem.'

'Are you John Macnab?' Johnson demanded.

'I'm anything you please,' said Lamancha, 'if you'll only hurry and get this man to bed.'

'Damn your impudence! What business is that of yours? You've been caught poaching and we'll march you down to Haripol and get the truth out of you. If you won't tell me who you are, I'll find means to make you . . . Macnicol, you and Macqueen get on each side of him, and you three fellows follow behind. If he tries to bolt, club him. . . . You can leave this man here. He'll take no harm, and we can send back for him later.'

'I'm sorry to interfere,' said Lamancha quietly, 'but Stokes is going down now. You needn't worry about me. I'll come with you, for I've got to see him comfortably settled.'

'You'll come with us!' Johnson shouted. 'Many thanks

for your kindness. You'll damn well be made to come. Macnicol, take hold of him.'

'Don't,' said Lamancha. 'Please don't. It will only mean trouble.'

Macnicol was acutely unhappy. He recognised something in Lamancha's tone, which was perhaps unfamiliar to his master — that accent which means authority, and which, if disregarded, leads to mischief. He had himself served in Lovat's Scouts, and the voice of this tatterdemalion was unpleasantly like that of certain high-handed officers of his acquaintance. So he hesitated and shuffled his feet.

'Look at the thing reasonably,' Lamancha said. 'You say I'm a poacher called John Something-or-other. I admit that you have found me walking with a rifle on your ground, and naturally you want an explanation. But all that can wait till we get this man down to a doctor. I won't run away, for I want to satisfy myself that he's going to be all right. Won't that content you?'

Johnson, to his disgust, felt that he was being manoeuvred into a false position. He was by no means unkind, and this infernal Macnab was making him appear a brute. Public opinion was clearly against him; Macnicol was obviously unwilling to act, Macqueen he knew detested him, and the three navvies might be supposed to take the side of their colleague. Johnson set a high value on public opinion, and scrupled to outrage it. So he curbed his wrath and gave orders that Stokes should be taken up. Two men formed a cradle with their arms, and the cortège proceeded down the hillside.

Lamancha took care to give his captors no uneasiness. He walked beside Macqueen, with whom he exchanged a

few comments on the weather, and he thought his own by no means pleasant thoughts. This confounded encounter with Stokes had wrecked everything, and yet he could not be altogether sorry that it had happened. He had a chance now of doing something for an honest fellow — Stokes's gallant lie to Johnson had convinced Lamancha of his superlative honesty. But it looked as if he were in for an ugly time with this young bounder, and he was beginning to dislike Johnson extremely. There were one or two points in his favour. The stag seemed to have departed with Wattie into the *Ewigkeit*, and happily no eye at the Beallach had seen the signs of the gralloch. All that Johnson could do was to accuse him of poaching, *teste* the rifle; he could not prove the deed. Lamancha was rather vague about the law, but he was doubtful whether mere trespass was a grave offence. Then the Claybodys would not want to make too much fuss about it, with the journalists booming the doings of John Macnab. . . . But wouldn't they? They were the kind of people that liked advertisement, and after all they had scored. What a tale for the cheap papers there would be in the capture of John Macnab! And if it got out who he was? . . . It was very clear that that at all costs must be prevented . . . Had Johnson Claybody any decent feelings to which he could appeal? A sportsman? Well, he didn't seem to be of much account in that line, for he had wanted to leave the poor devil on the hill.

It took some time for the party to reach the Doran, which they forded at a point considerably below Archie's former lair. Lamancha gave thanks for one mercy, that Archie and Wattie seemed to have got clean away. There was a car on the road which caused him a moment's un-

easiness, till he saw that it was not the Ford but a large car with an all-weather body coming from Haripol. The driver seemed to have his instructions, for he turned round — no light task in that narrow road with its boggy fringes — and awaited their arrival.

Johnson gave rapid orders. 'You march the fellow down the road, and bring the navvy — better take him to your cottage, Macqueen. I'll go home in the car and prepare a reception for Macnab.'

It may be assumed that Johnson spoke in haste, for he had somehow to work off his irritation, and desired to assert his authority.

'Hadn't Stokes better go in the car?' Lamancha suggested in a voice which he strove to make urbane. 'That journey down the hill can't have done his leg any good.'

Johnson replied by telling him to mind his own business, and then was foolish enough to add that he was hanged if he would have any lousy navvy in his car. He was preparing to enter, when something in Lamancha's voice stopped him.

'You can't,' said the latter. 'In common decency you can't.'

'Who'll prevent me? Now, look here, I'm fed up with your insolence. You'll be well advised to hold your tongue till we make up our minds how to deal with you. You're in a devilish nasty position, Mr. John Macnab, if you had the wits to see it. Macnicol, and you fellows, I'll fire the lot of you if he escapes on the road. You've my authority to hit him on the head if he gets nasty.'

Johnson's foot was on the step, when a hand on his shoulder swung him round.

'No, you don't.' Lamancha's voice had lost any trace

of civility, for he was very angry. 'Stokes goes in the car and one of the gillies with him. Here, you, lift the man in.'

Johnson had grown rather white, for he saw that the situation was working up to the ugliest kind of climax. He felt dimly that he was again defying public opinion, but his fury made him bold. He cursed Lamancha with vigour and freedom, but there was a slight catch in his voice, and a hint of anticlimax in his threats, for the truth was that he was a little afraid. Still it was a flat defiance, though it concluded with a sneering demand as to what and who would prevent him doing as he pleased, which sounded a trifle weak.

'First,' said Lamancha, 'I should have a try at wringing your neck. Then I should blast any reputation you may have up and down this land. I promise you I should make you very sorry you didn't stay in bed this morning.' Lamancha had succeeded in controlling himself — in especial he had checked the phrase 'infernal little haberdasher' which had risen to his lips — and his voice was civil and quiet again.

Johnson gave a mirthless laugh. 'I'm not afraid of a dirty poacher.'

'If I'm a poacher, that's no reason why you should behave like a cad.'

It is a melancholy fact which exponents of democracy must face that, while all men may be on a level in the eyes of the State, they will continue in fact to be preposterously unequal. Lamancha had been captured in circumstances of deep suspicion which he did not attempt to explain; he had been caught on Johnson's land, by Johnson's servants; the wounded man was in Johnson's

pay, and might reasonably be held to be at Johnson's orders; the car was without question Johnson's own. Yet this outrageous trespasser was not only truculent and impenitent, he was taking it upon himself to give orders to gillies and navvies, and to dictate the use of an expensive automobile. The truth is, that if you belong to a family which for a good many centuries has been accustomed to give orders and to take risks, and if you yourself, in the forty-odd years of your life, have rather courted trouble than otherwise, and have put discipline into Arab caravans, Central African natives, and Australian mounted brigades — well, when you talk about wringing necks your words may carry weight. If, too, you have never had occasion to think of your position, because no one has ever questioned it, and you promise to break down somebody else's, your threat may convince others, because you yourself are so wholly convinced of your power in that direction. It was the complete lack of bluster in Lamancha, his sober matter-of-factness, that made Johnson suddenly discover in this potato-bogle of a man something formidable. He hesitated, the gillies hesitated, and Lamancha saw his chance. Angry as he was, he contrived to be conciliatory.

'Don't let us lose our tempers. I've no right to dictate to you, but you must see that we're bound to look after this poor chap first. After that I'm at your disposal to give you any satisfaction you want.'

Johnson had not been practised in commercial negotiations for nothing. He saw that obstinacy would mean trouble, and would gain him little, and he cast about for a way to save his face. He went through a show of talking in whispers to Macnicol, a show which did not deceive his

head-stalker. Then he addressed Macqueen. 'We think we'd better get this fellow off our hands. You take him down in the car to your cottage, and put him in your spare bed. Then come round to the house and wait for me.'

'This is my show, if you'll allow me, sir,' said Lamancha politely. He took a couple of notes from a wad he carried in an inner pocket. 'Get hold of the nearest doctor — you can use the post-office telephone — and tell him to come at once, and get everything you need for Stokes. I'll see you again. Don't spare expense, for I'm responsible.'

The car departed, and the walking party continued its way down the Doran glen. Lamancha's anger was evaporating, philosophy had intervened, and he was prepared to make allowances for Johnson. But he recognised that the situation was delicate and the future cloudy, and, since he saw no way out, decided to wait patiently on events, always premising that on no account must he permit his identity to be discovered. That might yet involve violent action of a nature which he could not foresee. His consolation was the thought of the stag, now without doubt in the Crask larder. If only he could get clear of his captors, John Macnab would have won two out of the three events. Yes, and if Leithen and Palliser-Yeates had not blundered into captivity.

He was presently reassured as to the fate of the last. When the party entered the wooded lower glen of the Doran, it was joined by four weary navvies who had been refreshing themselves by holding their heads in the stream. Interrogated by Macnicol, they told a tale of hunting an elusive man for hours on the hillside, of repeatedly being on the point of laying hold of him, of a demo-

niac agility and a diabolical cunning, and of his final disappearance into the deeps of the wood. Questioned about Stokes, they knew nothing. He had last been seen by them in the early morning when the mist first cleared, but it was his business to keep moving high up the hill near the rocks and he had certainly not joined in the chase when it started.

Johnson's temper was not improved by this news. Twice he had been put to public shame in front of his servants by this arrogant tramp who was John Macnab. He had been insulted and defied, but he knew in his heart that the true bitterness lay in the fact that he had also been frightened. Anger, variegated by fear, is apt to cloud a man's common-sense, and Johnson's usual caution was deserting him. He was beginning to see red, and the news that there had been an accomplice was the last straw. Somehow or other he must get even with this bandit and bring him to the last extremity of disgrace. He must get him inside the splendours of Haripol, where, his foot on his native heath, he would recover the confidence which had been so lamentably to seek on the hill. . . . He would, of course, hand him over to the police, but his soul longed for some more spectacular dénouement. . . . Then he thought of the journalists, who had made such a nuisance of themselves in the morning. They were certain to be still about the place. If they could see his triumphant arrival at Haripol, they would write such a story as would blazon his credit to the world and make the frustrated poacher a laughing-stock.

As it chanced, as they entered one of the woodland drives of Haripol, they met the gillie, Andrew, on his way home for a late tea. He was asked if he had seen any

of the correspondents, and replied that he and Peter and Cameron had captured one after a hard chase, who at the moment was in Cameron's charge and using strong language about the liberty of the Press. Andrew was privately despatched to bid Cameron bring his captive, with all civility and many apologies, up to the house, with a message that Mr. Claybody would be glad to have a talk with him. Then, with three navvies as a vanguard and four as a rearguard, Lamancha was conducted down the glade between Johnson and Macnicol — the picture of a criminal in the grip of the law.

That picture was seen by a small boy who was lurking among the bracken. To the eyes of Benjie it spelt the uttermost disaster. The stag was safe at Crask, but the major part of John Macnab was in the hands of his enemies. Benjie thought hard for a minute, and then wriggled back into the covert and ran as hard as he could through the wood. To him at this awful crisis there seemed to be but a single hope. Force must be brought against force. The Bluidy Mackenzie, now tied up under a distant tree, must be launched upon the foe. The boy was aware that the dog had accepted him as an ally, but that he had developed for Lamancha the passion of his morose and solitary life.

The prisoner's uneasiness grew with every step he took down the sweet-scented twilit glade. He was being taken to the house, and in that house there would be people — women, perhaps — journalists maybe — and a most embarrassing situation for a Cabinet Minister. The whole enterprise, which had been so packed with comedy and adventure, was about to end in fiasco and disgrace, and it was he, the promoter, who had let the show down.

For the first time since he arrived at Crask Lamancha whole-heartedly wished himself out of the thing with a clean sheet. There was something to be said, after all, for a man keeping to his groove. . . .

They emerged from the trees, and before them stretched the lawns, with a large and important mansion at the other end. This was worse than his wildest dreams. He stopped short.

'Look here,' he said, 'isn't it time to end this farce? I admit I was trespassing and was fairly caught out. Isn't that enough?'

'By Gad, it isn't,' said Johnson, into whose bosom a certainty of triumph and revenge had at last entered. 'Into the house you go and there we'll get the truth out of you.'

'I'll pay any fine in reason, but I'm damned if I'm going near that house.'

For answer, Johnson nodded to Macnicol, and the two closed in on the prisoner. Lamancha, now really desperate, shook off the stalker and was about to break to his left, when Johnson tackled him and held him.

At the same moment the Bluidy Mackenzie took a hand in the game.

That faithful hound, conducted by Benjie, had just arrived on the scene of action. He saw his adored Lamancha, the first man who had really understood him, being assaulted by another whose appearance he did not favour. Like a stone from a sling he leaped from the covert straight at Mr. Johnson Claybody's throat.

It all happened in one crowded instant. Lamancha felt the impact of part of Mackenzie's body, saw Johnson stagger and fall, and next observed his captor running

wildly for the house with Mackenzie hot on his trail. Then, with that preposterous instinct to help human against animal which is deeper than reason, he started after him.

Never had a rising young commercial magnate shown a better turn of speed, for a mad dog was his private and particular fear, and this beast was clearly raving mad. Macnicol and the navvies were some twenty yards behind, but Lamancha was a close second. Crying hoarsely, Johnson leaped the flower-beds and doubled like a hare in and out of a pergola. Ahead lay his mother's pet new lily pond and, remembering dimly that mad dogs did not love water, he plunged into it and embraced a lead Cupid in the centre.

Mackenzie loved water like a spaniel and his great body shot after him. But the immersion caused a second's delay and enabled Lamancha to take a flying leap which brought him almost atop of the dog. He clutched his collar and swung him back, making a commotion in the fountain, like a tidal wave. Mackenzie recognised his friend and did not turn on him, but he still strained furiously after Johnson, who was now emerging like Proteus on the far side.

Suddenly the windows of the house, which was not thirty yards off, opened, and the stage filled up with figures. First the amazed eyes of Lamancha saw Crossby entering from the right, evidently a prisoner, in the charge of two gillies. Then at one set of windows appeared Sir Edward Leithen with a scared face, while from the other emerged the forms of Sir Archibald Roy-lance, Mr. Palliser-Yeates, and a stout gentleman in a kilt who might be Lord Claybody. To his mind, keyed by

wrath and confusion to expectation of tragedy, there could only be one solution. Others besides himself had failed, and the secret of John Macnab was horribly patent to the world.

‘Archie,’ he panted, ‘for God’s sake, call off your tripe-hound. I can’t hold on any longer. . . . He’ll eat that little man.’

Lord Claybody had unusual penetration. He observed his son and heir dripping and exhausted on the turf, and a figure, which looked like a caricature in the Opposition Press of an eminent Tory statesman, surrendering a savage hound to a small and dirty boy. Also he saw in the background a group of gillies and navvies. There was mystery here which had better be unriddled away from the gaze of the profane crowd. His eye caught Crosby’s and Lamancha’s.

‘I think you’d better all come indoors,’ he said.

CHAPTER XV

HARIPOL — THE ARMISTICE

THE great drawing-room had lost all its garishness with the approach of evening. Facing eastward, it looked out on lawns now dreaming in a green dusk, though beyond them the setting sun, overtopping the house, washed the woods and hills with gold and purple. Lady Claybody sat on a brocaded couch with something of the dignity of the late Queen Victoria, mystified, perturbed, awaiting the explanation which was her due. Her husband stood before her, a man with such an air of being ready for any emergency that even his kilt looked workmanlike. The embarrassed party from Crask clustered in the background; the shameful figures of Lamancha and Johnson stood in front of the window, thereby deepening the shadow. So electric was the occasion that Lady Claybody, finically proud of her house, did not notice that these two were oozing water over the polished parquet and devastating more than one expensive rug.

Lamancha, now that the worst had happened, was resigned and almost cheerful. Since the Claybodys had bagged Leithen and Palliser-Yeates and detected the complicity of Sir Archie, there was no reason why he should be left out. He hoped, rather vaguely, that his captors might not be inclined to make the thing public in view of certain episodes, but he had got to the pitch of caring very little. John Macnab was dead, and only awaited sepulture and oblivion. He looked towards Johnson, expecting him to take up the tale.

But Johnson had no desire to speak. He had been very

much shaken and scared by the Bluidy Mackenzie and had not yet recovered his breath. Also a name spoken by his father as they entered the room had temporarily unsettled his wits. It was Lord Claybody who broke the uncomfortable silence.

'Who owns that dog?' he asked, looking, not at Lamancha, but at his son.

'The brute's mine,' said Archie penitently. 'He followed the car and I left him tied up. Can't think how he got loose and started this racket.'

The master of the house turned to Lamancha.

'How did you come here, my lord? You look as if you had been having a rough journey.'

Lamancha laughed. Happily the waning light did not reveal the full extent of his dirt and raggedness. 'I have,' he said. 'I'm your son's prisoner. Fairly caught out. I dare say you think me an idiot, unless Leithen or Palliser-Yeates has explained.'

Lord Claybody looked more mystified than ever.

'I don't understand. A prisoner?'

'He's John Macnab,' put in Johnson, whose breath was returning and with it sulkiness. He was beginning to see that there was to be no triumph in this business, and a good deal of unpleasant explanation.

'Well, a third of him,' said Lamancha. 'And as you've already annexed the other two thirds you have the whole of the fellow under your roof.'

Lord Claybody's gasp suddenly revealed to Lamancha that he had been premature in his confession. How his two friends had got into the Haripol drawing-room he did not know, but apparently it was not as prisoners. The mischief was done, however, and there was no going back.

‘You mean to say that you three gentlemen are John Macnab? You have been poaching at Glenraden and Strathlarrig? Does Colonel Raden — does Mr. Bandicott know who you are?’

Lamancha nodded. ‘They found out after we had had our shot at their preserves. They didn’t mind — took it very well, indeed. We hope you’re going to follow suit?’

‘But I am amazed. You had only to send me a note and my forest was at your disposal for as long as you wished. Why — why this — this incivility?’

‘I assure you, on my honour, that the last thing we dreamed of was incivility. . . . Look here, Lord Claybody, I wonder if I can explain. We three — Leithen, Palliser-Yeates, and myself — found ourselves three months ago fairly fed up with life. We weren’t sick, and we weren’t tired — only bored. By accident we discovered each other’s complaint, and we decided to have a try at curing ourselves by attempting something very difficult and rather dangerous. There was a fellow called Tarras used to play this game — he was before your time — and we resolved to take a leaf out of his book. So we quartered ourselves on Archie — he’s not to blame, remember, for he’s been protesting bitterly all along — and we sent out our challenge. Glenraden and Strathlarrig accepted it, so that was all right; you didn’t in so many words, but you accepted it by your action, for you took elaborate precautions to safeguard your ground. . . . Well, that’s all. Palliser-Yeates lost at Glenraden owing to Miss Janet. Leithen won at Strathlarrig, and now I’ve made a regular hat of things at Haripol. But we’re cured, all of us. We’re simply longing to get back to the life which in July we thought humbug.’

Lord Claybody sat down in a chair and brooded.

'I still don't follow,' he said. 'You are people who matter a great deal to the world, and there's not a man in this country who wouldn't have been proud to give you the chance of the kind of holiday you needed. You're one of the leaders of my party. Personally, I have always considered you the best of them. I'm looking to Sir Edward Leithen to win a big case for me this autumn. Mr. Palliser-Yeates has done a lot of business with my firm, and after the talk I've had with him this afternoon I look to doing a good deal more with him in the future. You had only to give me a hint of what you wished and I should have jumped at the chance of obliging you. You wanted the thrill of feeling like poachers. Well, I would have seen that you got it. I would have turned on every man in the place and used all my wits to make your escapade difficult. Wouldn't that have contented you?'

'No, no,' Lamancha cried. 'You are missing the point. Don't you see that your way would have taken all the gloss off the adventure and made it a game? We had to feel that we were taking real risks — that, being what we were, we should look utter fools if we were caught and exposed.'

'Pardon me, but it is you who are missing the point.' Lord Claybody was smiling. 'You could never have been exposed — except perhaps by those confounded journalists,' he added as he caught sight of Crossby.

'We had the best of them on our side,' Lamancha put in. 'Mr. Crossby has backed us up nobly.'

'Well, that only made your position more secure. Colonel Raden and Mr. Bandicott accepted your challenge, and in any case they were sportsmen, and you

knew it. If they had caught one or the other of you, they would never have betrayed you. You must see that. And here at Haripol you were on the safest ground of all. I'm not what they call a sportsman — not yet — but I couldn't give you away. Do you think it conceivable that I would do anything to weaken the public prestige of a statesman I believe in, a great lawyer I brief, and a great banker whose assistance is of the utmost value to me? I'm a man who has made a fortune by my own hard work and I mean to keep it; therefore in these bad times I am out to support anything which buttresses the solid structure of society. You three are part of that structure. You might poach every stag in Haripol and I should still hold my tongue.'

Lamancha, regardless of the condition of his nether garments, sat down heavily on an embroidered stool which Lady Claybody erroneously believed to have belonged to Marie Antoinette, and dropped his head in his hands.

'Lord, I believe you're right,' he groaned. 'We've all been potting at sitting birds. John, do you hear? We've been making godless fools of ourselves. We thought we had got outside civilisation and were really taking chances. But we weren't. We were all the time as safe as your blessed bank. It can't be done — not in this country anyway. We're in the groove and have got to stay there. We've been a pretty lot of idiots not to think of that.'

Then Johnson spoke. He had been immensely cheered by Lord Claybody's words, for they had seemed to raise Haripol again to that dignity from which it had been in imminent risk of falling.

'I don't complain personally, Lord Lamancha, though

you've given me a hard day of it. But I agree with my father — you really were gambling on a certainty and it wasn't very fair to us. Besides, you three, who are the supporters of law and order, have offered a pretty good handle to the enemy, with these infernal journalists advertising John Macnab. There may be a large crop of Macnabs springing up, and you'll be responsible. It's a dangerous thing to weaken the sanctities of property.'

He found, to his surprise, a vigorous opponent in his mother. Lady Claybody had passed from mystification to enlightenment, and from enlightenment to appreciation. It delighted her romantic soul that Haripol should have been chosen for the escapade of three eminent men; she saw tradition and legend already glorifying her new dwelling. Moreover, she scented in Johnson's words a theory of life which was not her own, a mercantile creed which conflicted with her notion of Haripol, and of the future of her family.

'You are talking nonsense, Johnson,' she said. 'You are making property a nightmare, for you are always thinking about it. You forget that wealth is made for man, and not man for wealth. It is the personality that matters. It is so vulgar not to keep money and land and that sort of thing in its proper place. Look at those splendid old Jacobites and what they gave up. The one advantage of property is that you can disregard it.'

This astounding epigram passed unnoticed save by Janet, for the lady, smiling benignly on the poaching trinity, went on to a practical application. 'I think the whole John Macnab adventure has been quite delightful. It has brightened us all up, and I'm sure we have nothing to forgive. I think we must have a dinner for everybody

concerned to celebrate the end of it. What Claybody says is perfectly true — you must have known you could count on us, just as much as on Colonel Raden and Mr. Bandicott. But since you seem not to have realised that, you have had the fun of thinking you were in real danger, and after all it is what one thinks that matters. I am so glad you are all cured of being bored. But I'm not quite happy about those journalists. How can we be certain that they won't make a horrid story of it?'

'My wife is right,' said Lord Claybody emphatically. 'That is the danger.' He looked at Crossby. 'They are certain to want some kind of account.'

'They certainly will,' said the latter. 'And that account must leave out names and — and other details. I don't suppose you want the navy business made public?'

'Perhaps not. That was Johnson's idea, and I don't consider it a particularly happy inspiration.'

'Well, there is nothing for it but that I should give them the story and expurgate it discreetly. John Macnab has been caught and dismissed with a warning — that's all there is to it. I suppose your gillies won't blab? They all can't know very much, but they might give away some awkward details.'

'I'll jolly well see that they don't,' said Johnson. 'But who will you make John Macnab out to be?'

'A lunatic — unnamed. I'll hint at some family skeleton into which good breeding forbids me to enquire. The fact that he has failed at Haripol will take the edge off my colleagues' appetites. If he had got his stag, they would have been ramping on the trail. The whole thing will go the way of other stunts, and be forgotten in two days. I know the British Press.'

Within half an hour the atmosphere in that drawing-room had changed from suspicion to something not far from friendliness, but the change left two people unaffected. Johnson, doubtless with Lamancha's behaviour on the hill in his memory, was still sullen, and Janet was obviously ill at ease.

Lamancha, who was suffering a good deal from thirst and hunger and longed for a bath, arose from his stool.

'I think,' he said, 'that we three — especially myself — owe you the most abject apologies. I see now that we were taking no risks worth mentioning, and that what we thought was an adventure was only a *faux pas*. It was abominably foolish, and we are all very sorry about it. I think you've taken it uncommonly well.'

Lord Claybody raised a protesting hand. 'Not another word. I vote we break up this conference and give you something to drink. Johnson's tongue is hanging out of his mouth.'

The voice of Janet was suddenly raised, and in it might have been detected a new timidity. 'I want to apologise also. Dear Lady Claybody, I stole your dog. . . . I hope you will forgive me. You see we wanted to do something, to distract Macnicol, and that seemed the only way.'

A sudden silence fell. Lady Claybody, had there been sufficient light, might have been observed to flush.

'You — stole — Roguie,' she said slowly, while Janet moved closer to Sir Archie. 'You — stole — Wee Roguie. I think you are the —'

'But we were very kind to him, and he was very happy.'

‘I wasn’t happy. I scarcely slept a wink. What right had you to touch my precious little dog? I think it is the most monstrous thing I ever heard in my life.’

‘I’m so very sorry. Please, please forgive me. But you said yourself that the only advantage of property was that you could disregard it.’

Lady Claybody, to her enormous credit, stared, gaped, and then laughed. Then something in the attitude of Janet and Archie stopped her, and she asked suddenly: ‘Are you two engaged?’

‘Yes,’ said Janet, ‘since ten minutes past twelve this morning.’

Lady Claybody rose from the couch and took her in her arms.

‘You’re the wickedest girl in the world and the most delightful. Oh, my dear, I am so pleased. Sir Archibald, you will let an old woman kiss you. You are brigands, both of you, so you should be very, very happy. You must all come and dine here to-morrow night — your father and sister, too, and we’ll ask the Bandicotts. It will be a dinner to announce your engagement, and also to say good-bye to John Macnab. Poor John! I feel as if he were a real person who will always haunt this glen, and now he is disappearing into the mist.’

‘No,’ said Lamancha, ‘he is being shrivelled up by coals of fire. By the way’ — and he turned to Lord Claybody — ‘I’ll send over the stag in the morning. I forgot to tell you I got a stag — an old beast with a famous head, who used to visit Crask. It will look rather well in your hall. It has been in Archie’s larder since the early afternoon.’

Then Johnson Claybody was moved to a course which

surprised his audience and may have surprised himself. His sullenness vanished in hearty laughter.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘I have made rather a fool of myself.’

‘I think we have all made fools of ourselves,’ said Lamancha.

Johnson turned to his late prisoner and held out his hand.

‘Lord Lamancha, I have only one thing to say. I don’t in the least agree with my mother, and I’m dead against John Macnab. But I’m *your* man from this day on — whatever line you take. You’re my leader, for, by all that’s holy, you’ve a most astonishing gift of getting the goods.’

EPILOGUE

CROSSBY, from whom I had most of this narrative, was as good as his word, though it went sorely against the grain. He himself wrote a tale, and circulated his version to his brother journalists, which made a good enough yarn, but was a sad anticlimax to the Return of Harald Blacktooth. He told of a gallant but frustrated attempt on the Haripol Sanctuary, the taking of the culprit, and the magnanimous release by young Mr. Claybody of a nameless monomaniac — a gentleman, it was hinted, who had not recovered from the effects of the War. The story did not occupy a prominent page in the papers, and presently, as he had prophesied, the world had forgotten John Macnab, and had turned its attention to the cinema star, just arrived in London, whom for several days, to the disgust of that lady's agents it had strangely neglected.

The dinner at Haripol, Crossby told me, was a hilarious function, at which four men found reason to modify their opinion of the son of the house, and the host fell in love with Janet, and Archie with his hostess. There is talk, I understand, of making it an annual event to keep green the memory of the triune sportsman who once haunted the place. If you go to Haripol, as I did last week, you will see above the hall chimney a noble thirteen-pointer, and a legend beneath proclaiming that the stag was shot on the Sgurr Dearg beat of the forest by the Earl of Lamancha on a certain day of September in a certain year. Lady Claybody, who does not like stags'

heads as ornaments, makes an exception of this: indeed, it is the one of her household treasures to which she most often calls her guests' attention.

Janet and Archie were married in November in the little kirk of Inverlarrig, and three busy men cancelled urgent engagements to be there. Among the presents there was one not shown to the public or mentioned in the papers, and a duplicate of it went to Junius and Agatha at their wedding in the following spring. It was a noble loving-cup in the form of a quaich, inscribed as the gift of John Macnab. Below four signatures were engraved — Lamancha, Edward Leithen, and John Palliser-Yeates, and last, in a hand of surprising boldness, the honoured name of Benjamin Bogle.

THE END

THE THREE HOSTAGES

To
A Young Gentleman of Eton College

HONOURED SIR,

ON your last birthday a well-meaning godfather presented you with a volume of mine, since you had been heard on occasion to express approval of my works. The book dealt with a somewhat arid branch of historical research, and it did not please you. You wrote to me, I remember, complaining that I had "let you down," and summoning me, as I valued your respect, to "pull myself together." In particular you demanded to hear more of the doings of Richard Hannay, a gentleman for whom you professed a liking. I, too, have a liking for Sir Richard, and when I met him the other day (he is now a country neighbour) I observed that his left hand had been considerably mauled, an injury which I knew had not been due to the War. He was so good as to tell me the tale of an unpleasant business in which he had recently been engaged, and to give me permission to retell it for your benefit. Sir Richard took a modest pride in the affair, because from first to last it had been a pure contest of wits, without recourse to those more obvious methods of strife with which he is familiar. So I herewith present it to you, in the hope that in the eyes of you and your friends it may atone for certain other writings of mine with which you have been afflicted by those in authority.

J. B.

June, 1924

NOTE

Occasional references will be found in this tale to the earlier experiences of Sir Richard Hannay, which are chronicled in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle*, and *Mr. Standfast*.

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THE THREE HOSTAGES



CHAPTER I

DR. GREENSLADE THEORISES

THAT evening, I remember, as I came up through the Mill Meadow, I was feeling peculiarly happy and contented. It was still mid-March, one of those spring days when noon is like May, and only the cold pearly haze at sunset warns a man that he is not done with winter. The season was absurdly early, for the blackthorn was in flower and the hedge roots were full of primroses. The partridges were paired, the rooks were well on with their nests, and the meadows were full of shimmering grey flocks of fieldfares on their way north. I put up half a dozen snipe on the boggy edge of the stream, and in the bracken in Sturn Wood I thought I saw a woodcock, and hoped that the birds might nest with us this year, as they used to do long ago. It was jolly to see the world coming to life again, and to remember that this patch of England was my own, and all these wild things, so to speak, members of my little household.

As I say, I was in a very contented mood, for I had found something I had longed for all my days. I had bought Fosse Manor just after the War as a wedding present for Mary, and for two and a half years we had been settled there. My son, Peter John, was rising fifteen months, a thoughtful infant, as healthy as a young colt and as comic as a terrier puppy. Even Mary's anx-

ious eye could scarcely detect in him any symptoms of decline. But the place wanted a lot of looking to, for it had run wild during the War, and the woods had to be thinned, gates and fences repaired, new drains laid, a ram put in to supplement the wells, a heap of thatching to be done, and the garden borders to be brought back to cultivation. I had got through the worst of it, and as I came out of the Home Wood on to the lower lawns and saw the old stone gables that the monks had built, I felt that I was anchored at last in the pleasantest kind of harbour.

There was a pile of letters on the table in the hall, but I let them be, for I was not in the mood for any communication with the outer world. As I was having a hot bath, Mary kept giving me the news through her bedroom door. Peter John had been raising Cain over a first tooth; the new shorthorn cow was drying off; old George Whaddon had got his granddaughter back from service; there was a new brood of runner-ducks; there was a misel-thrush building in the box hedge by the lake: a chronicle of small beer, you will say, but I was by a long chalk more interested in it than in what might be happening in Parliament or Russia or the Hindu Kush. The fact is I was becoming such a mossback that I had almost stopped reading the papers. Many a day the "Times" would remain unopened, for Mary never looked at anything but the first page to see who was dead or married. Not that I didn't read a lot, for I used to spend my evenings digging into county history, and learning all I could about the old fellows who had been my predecessors. I liked to think that I lived in a place that had been continuously inhabited for a thousand years. Cavalier and Roundhead had fought over the country-side, and I was becom-

ing a considerable authority on their tiny battles. That was about the only interest I had left in soldiering.

As we went downstairs, I remember we stopped to look out of the long staircase window which showed a segment of lawn, a corner of the lake, and through a gap in the woods a vista of green downland. Mary squeezed my arm. "What a blessed country," she said. "Dick, did you ever dream of such peace? We're lucky, lucky people."

Then suddenly her face changed in that way she has and grew very grave. I felt a little shiver run along her arm.

"It's too good and beloved to last," she whispered. "Sometimes I am afraid."

"Nonsense," I laughed. "What's going to upset it? I don't believe in being afraid of happiness." I knew very well, of course, that Mary couldn't be afraid of anything.

She laughed too. "All the same I've got what the Greek called 'aidos.' You don't know what that means, you old savage. It means that you feel you must walk humbly and delicately to propitiate the Fates. I wish I knew how."

She walked too delicately, for she missed the last step and our descent ended in an undignified shuffle right into the arms of Dr. Greenslade.

Paddock — I had got Paddock back after the War and he was now my butler — was helping the doctor out of his ulster, and I saw by the satisfied look on the latter's face that he was through with his day's work and meant to stay to dinner. Here I had better introduce Tom Greenslade, for of all my recent acquaintances he was the one I had most taken to. He was a long lean fellow with a

stoop in his back from bending over the handles of motor-bicycles, with reddish hair, and the greeny-blue eyes and freckled skin that often accompany that kind of hair. From his high cheek bones and his colouring you would have set him down as a Scotsman, but as a matter of fact he came from Devonshire — Exmoor, I think, though he had been so much about the world that he had almost forgotten where he was raised. I have travelled a bit, but nothing to Greenslade. He had started as a doctor in a whaling ship. Then he had been in the South African War and afterwards a temporary magistrate up Lydenburg way. He soon tired of that, and was for a long spell in Uganda and German East, where he became rather a swell on tropical diseases, and nearly perished through experimenting on himself with fancy inoculations. Then he was in South America, where he had a good practice in Valparaiso, and then in the Malay States, where he made a bit of money in the rubber boom. There was a gap of three years after that when he was wandering about Central Asia, partly with a fellow called Duckett exploring Northern Mongolia, and partly in Chinese Tibet hunting for new flowers, for he was mad about botany. He came home in the summer of 1914, meaning to do some laboratory research work, but the War swept him up and he went to France as M.O. of a territorial battalion. He got wounded, of course, and after a spell in hospital went out to Mesopotamia, where he stayed till the Christmas of 1918, sweating hard at his job, but managing to tumble into a lot of varied adventures, for he was at Baku with Dunsterville and got as far as Tashkend, where the Bolsheviks shut him up for a fortnight in a bath-house. During the war he had every kind of sickness, for he missed no experience, but nothing seemed

to damage permanently his whipcord physique. He told me that his heart and lungs and blood pressure were as good as a lad's of twenty-one, though by this time he was on the wrong side of forty.

But when the War was over he hankered for a quiet life, so he bought a practice in the deepest and greenest corner of England. He said his motive was the same as that which in the rackety Middle Ages made men retire into monasteries; he wanted quiet and leisure to consider his soul. Quiet he may have found, but uncommon little leisure, for I never heard of a country doctor that toiled at his job as he did. He would pay three visits a day to a panel patient, which shows the kind of fellow he was; and he would be out in the small hours at the birth of a gipsy child under a hedge. He was a first-class man in his profession, and kept abreast of it, but doctoring was only one of a thousand interests. I never met a chap with such an insatiable curiosity about everything in heaven and earth. He lived in two rooms in a farmhouse some four miles from us, and I dare say he had several thousand books about him. All day, and often half the night, he would scour the country in his little run-about car, and yet, when he would drop in to see me and have a drink after maybe twenty visits, he was as full of beans as if he had just got out of bed. Nothing came amiss to him in talk — birds, beasts, flowers, books, politics, religion — everything in the world except himself. He was the best sort of company, for behind all his quickness and cleverness you felt that he was solid bar-gold. But for him I should have taken root in the soil and put out shoots, for I have a fine natural talent for vegetating. Mary strongly approved of him and Peter John adored him.

He was in tremendous spirits that evening, and for once in a way gave us reminiscences of his past. He told us about the people he badly wanted to see again; an Irish Spaniard up in the north of the Argentine who had for cattle-men a most murderous brand of native from the mountains, whom he used to keep in good humour by arranging fights every Sunday, he himself taking on the survivor with his fists and always knocking him out; a Scots trader from Hankow who had turned Buddhist priest and intoned his prayers with a strong Glasgow accent; and most of all a Malay pirate, who, he said, was a sort of Saint Francis with beasts, though a perfect Nero with his fellow-men. That took him to Central Asia, and he observed that if ever he left England again he would make for those parts, since they were the refuge of all the superior rascality of creation. He had a notion that something very odd might happen there in the long run. "Think of it!" he cried. "All the places with names like spells — Bokhara, Samarkand — run by seedy little gangs of communist Jews. It won't go on forever. Some day a new Genghis Khan or a Timour will be thrown up out of the maelstrom. Europe is confused enough, but Asia is ancient Chaos."

After dinner we sat round the fire in the library, which I had modelled on Sir Walter Bullivant's room in his place on the Kennet, as I had promised myself seven years ago. I had meant it for my own room where I could write and read and smoke, but Mary would not allow it. She had a jolly panelled sitting-room of her own upstairs, which she rarely entered; but though I chased her away, she was like a hen in a garden and always came back, so that presently she had staked out a claim on the other side of my writing-table. I have the old hunter's notion

of order, but it was useless to strive with Mary, so now my desk was littered with her letters and needlework, and Peter John's toys and picture-books were stacked in the cabinet where I kept my fly-books, and Peter John himself used to make a kraal every morning inside an up-turned stool on the hearth-rug.

It was a cold night and very pleasant by the fireside, where some scented logs from an old pear-tree were burning. The doctor picked up a detective novel I had been reading, and glanced at the title page.

"I can read most things," he said, "but it beats me how you waste time over such stuff. These shockers are too easy, Dick. You could invent better ones for yourself."

"Not I. I call that a dashed ingenious yarn. I can't think how the fellow does it."

"Quite simple. The author writes the story inductively, and the reader follows it deductively. Do you see what I mean?"

"Not a bit," I replied.

"Look here. I want to write a shocker, so I begin by fixing on one or two facts which have no sort of obvious connection."

"For example?"

"Well, imagine anything you like. Let us take three things a long way apart" — he paused for a second to consider — "say, an old blind woman spinning in the Western Highlands, a barn in a Norwegian *saeter*, and a little curiosity shop in North London kept by a Jew with a dyed beard. Not much connection between the three? You invent a connection — simple enough if you have any imagination, and you weave all three into the yarn. The reader, who knows nothing about the three at the

start, is puzzled and intrigued and, if the story is well arranged, finally satisfied. He is pleased with the ingenuity of the solution, for he doesn't realise that the author fixed upon the solution first, and then invented a problem to suit it."

"I see," I said. "You've gone and taken the gilt off my favourite light reading. I won't be able any more to marvel at the writer's cleverness."

"I've another objection to the stuff — it's not ingenious enough, or rather it doesn't take account of the infernal complexity of life. It might have been all right twenty years ago, when most people argued and behaved fairly logically. But they don't nowadays. Have you ever realised, Dick, the amount of stark craziness that the War has left in the world?"

Mary, who was sitting sewing under a lamp, raised her head and laughed.

Greenslade's face had become serious. "I can speak about it frankly here, for you two are almost the only completely sane people I know. Well, as a pathologist, I'm fairly staggered. I hardly meet a soul who hasn't got some slight kink in his brain as a consequence of the last seven years. With most people it's rather a pleasant kink — they're less settled in their grooves, and they see the comic side of things quicker, and are readier for adventure. But with some it's *pukka* madness, and that means crime. Now, how are you going to write detective stories about that kind of world on the old lines? You can take nothing for granted, as you once could, and your argus-eyed, lightning-brained expert has nothing solid with which to build his foundations."

I observed that the poor old War seemed to be getting blamed for a good deal that I was taught in my childhood was due to original sin.

"Oh, I'm not questioning your Calvinism. Original sin is always there, but the meaning of civilisation was that we had got it battened down under hatches, whereas now it's getting its head up. But it isn't only sin. It's a dislocation of the mechanism of human reasoning, a general loosening of screws. Oddly enough, in spite of parrot-talk about shell-shock, the men who fought suffer less from it on the whole than other people. The classes that shirked the War are the worst—you see it in Ireland. Every doctor nowadays has got to be a bit of a mental pathologist. As I say, you can hardly take anything for granted, and if you want detective stories that are not childish fantasy you'll have to invent a new kind. Better try your hand, Dick."

"Not I. I'm a lover of sober facts."

"But, hang it, man, the facts are no longer sober. I could tell you —" He paused and I was expecting a varn, but he changed his mind.

"Take all this chatter about psycho-analysis. There's nothing very new in the doctrine, but people are beginning to work it out into details, and making considerable asses of themselves in the process. It's an awful thing when a scientific truth becomes the quarry of the half-baked. But as I say, the fact of the subconscious self is as certain as the existence of lungs and arteries."

"I don't believe that Dick has any subconscious self," said Mary.

"Oh yes, he has. Only, people who have led his kind of life have their ordinary self so well managed and disciplined — their wits so much about them, as the phrase goes — that the subconscious rarely gets a show. But I bet if Dick took to thinking about his soul, which he never does, he would find some queer corners. Take my

own case." He turned towards me so that I had a full view of his candid eyes and hungry cheek-bones which looked prodigious in the firelight. "I belong more or less to the same totem as you, but I've long been aware that I possessed a most curious kind of subconsciousness. I've a good memory and fair powers of observation, but they're nothing to those of my subconscious self. Take any daily incident. I see and hear, say, about a twentieth part of the details and remember about a hundredth part — that is, assuming that there is nothing special to stimulate my interest. But my subconscious self sees and hears practically everything, and remembers most of it. Only I can't use the memory, for I don't know that I've got it, and can't call it into being when I wish. But every now and then something happens to turn on the tap of the subconscious, and a thin trickle comes through. I find myself sometimes remembering names I was never aware of having heard, and little incidents and details I had never consciously noticed. Imagination, you will say; but it isn't, for everything that that inner memory provides is exactly true. I've tested it. If I could only find some way of tapping it at will, I should be an uncommonly efficient fellow. Incidentally I should become the first scientist of the age, for the trouble with investigation and experiment is that the ordinary brain does not observe sufficiently keenly or remember the data sufficiently accurately."

"That's interesting," I said. "I'm not at all certain I haven't noticed the same thing in myself. But what has that to do with the madness that you say is infecting the world?"

"Simply this. The barriers between the conscious and the subconscious have always been pretty stiff in the

average man. But now with the general loosening of screws they are growing shaky and the two worlds are getting mixed. It is like two separate tanks of fluid, where the containing wall has worn into holes, and one is percolating into the other. The result is confusion, and, if the fluids are of a certain character, explosions. That is why I say that you can't any longer take the clear psychology of most civilised human beings for granted. Something is welling up from primeval deeps to muddy it."

"I don't object to that," I said. "We've overdone civilisation, and personally I'm all for a little barbarism. I want a simpler world."

"Then you won't get it," said Greenslade. He had become very serious now, and was looking towards Mary as he talked. "The civilised is far simpler than the primeval. All history has been an effort to make definitions, clear rules of thought, clear rules of conduct, solid sanctions, by which we can conduct our life. These are the work of the conscious self. The subconscious is an elementary and lawless thing. If it intrudes on life two results must follow. There will be a weakening of the power of reasoning, which after all is the thing that brings men nearest to the Almighty. And there will be a failure of nerve."

I got up to get a light, for I was beginning to feel depressed by the doctor's diagnosis of our times. I don't know whether he was altogether serious, for he presently started on fishing, which was one of his many hobbies. There was very fair dry-fly fishing to be had in our little river, but I had taken a deer-forest with Archie Roylance for the season, and Greenslade was coming up with me to try his hand at salmon. There had been no sea-trout

the year before in the West Highlands, and we fell to discussing the cause. He was ready with a dozen theories, and we forgot about the psychology of mankind in investigating the uncanny psychology of fish. After that Mary sang to us, for I considered any evening a failure without that, and at half-past ten the doctor got into his old ulster and departed.

As I smoked my last pipe I found my thoughts going over Greenslade's talk. I had found a snug harbour, but how yeasty the waters seemed to be outside the bar and how erratic the tides! I wondered if it wasn't shirking to be so comfortable in a comfortless world. Then I reflected that I was owed a little peace, for I had had a roughish life. But Mary's words kept coming back to me about "walking delicately." I considered that my present conduct filled that bill, for I was mighty thankful for my mercies and in no way inclined to tempt Providence by complacency.

Going up to bed, I noticed my neglected letters on the hall table. I turned them over and saw that they were mostly bills and receipts or tradesmen's circulars. But there was one addressed in a handwriting that I knew, and as I looked at it I experienced a sudden sinking of the heart. It was from Lord Artinswell — Sir Walter Bullivant, as was — who had now retired from the Foreign Office, and was living at his place on the Kennet. He and I occasionally corresponded about farming and fishing, but I had a premonition that this was something different. I waited for a second or two before I opened it.

MY DEAR DICK,

This note is in the nature of a warning. In the next day or two you will be asked, nay pressed, to undertake a troublesome piece of business. I am not responsible for the request,

but I know of it. If you consent, it will mean the end for a time of your happy vegetable life. I don't want to influence you one way or another; I only give you notice of what is coming in order that you may adjust your mind and not be taken by surprise. My love to Mary and the son.

Yours ever,

A.

That was all. I had lost my trepidation and felt very angry. Why couldn't the fools let me alone? As I went upstairs I vowed that not all the cajolery in the world would make me budge an inch from the path I had set myself. I had done enough for the public service and other people's interests, and it was jolly well time that I should be allowed to attend to my own.

CHAPTER II

I HEAR OF THE THREE HOSTAGES

THERE is an odour about a country-house which I love better than any scent in the world. Mary used to say it was a mixture of lamp and dog and wood-smoke, but at Fosse, where there was electric light and no dogs indoors, I fancy it was wood-smoke, tobacco, the old walls, and wafts of the country coming in at the windows. I liked it best in the morning, when there was a touch in it of breakfast cooking, and I used to stand at the top of the staircase and sniff it as I went to my bath. But on the morning I write of I could take no pleasure in it; indeed it seemed to tantalise me with a vision of country peace which had somehow got broken. I couldn't get that confounded letter out of my head. When I read it I had torn it up in disgust, but I found myself going down in my dressing-gown, to the surprise of a housemaid, piecing together the fragments from the waste-paper basket, and reading it again. This time I flung the bits into the new-kindled fire.

I was perfectly resolved that I would have nothing to do with Bullivant or any of his designs, but all the same I could not recapture the serenity which yesterday had clothed me like a garment. I was down to breakfast before Mary, and had finished before she appeared. Then I lit my pipe and started on my usual tour of my domain, but nothing seemed quite the same. It was a soft fresh morning with no frost, and the scillas along the edge of the lake were like bits of summer sky. The moor-hens

were building, and the first daffodils were out in the rough grass below the clump of Scots firs, and old George Whaddon was nailing up rabbit wire and whistling through his two remaining teeth, and generally the world was as clear and jolly as spring could make it. But I didn't feel any more that it was really mine, only that I was looking on at a pretty picture. Something had happened to jar the harmony between it and my mind, and I cursed Bullivant and his intrusions.

I returned by the front of the house, and there at the door to my surprise stood a big touring Rolls-Royce. Paddock met me in the hall and handed me a card, on which I read the name of Mr. Julius Victor.

I knew it, of course, for the name of one of the richest men in the world, the American banker who had done a lot of Britain's financial business in the war, and was in Europe now at some international conference. I remembered that Blenkiron, who didn't like his race, had once described him to me as "the whitest Jew since the Apostle Paul."

In the library I found a tall man standing by the window looking out at our view. He turned as I entered, and I saw a thin face with a neatly trimmed grey beard, and the most worried eyes I have ever seen in a human countenance. Everything about him was spruce and dapper—his beautifully cut grey suit, his black tie and pink pearl pin, his blue-and-white linen, his exquisitely polished shoes. But the eyes were so wild and anxious that he looked dishevelled.

"General," he said, and took a step towards me.

We shook hands and I made him sit down.

"I have dropped the 'General,' if you don't mind," I said. "What I want to know is, have you had breakfast?"

He shook his head. "I had a cup of coffee on the road. I do not eat in the morning."

"Where have you come from, sir?" I asked.

"From London."

Well, London is seventy-six miles from us, so he must have started early. I looked curiously at him, and he got out of his chair and began to stride about.

"Sir Richard," he said, in a low pleasant voice which I could imagine convincing any man he tried it on, "you are a soldier and a man of the world and will pardon my unconventionality. My business is too urgent to waste time on apologies. I have heard of you from common friends as a man of exceptional resource and courage. I have been told in confidence something of your record. I have come to implore your help in a desperate emergency."

I passed him a box of cigars, and he took one and lit it carefully. I could see his long slim fingers trembling as he held the match.

"You may have heard of me," he went on. "I am a very rich man, and my wealth has given me power, so that Governments honour me with their confidence. I am concerned in various important affairs, and it would be false modesty to deny that my word is weightier than that of many Prime Ministers. I am labouring, Sir Richard, to secure peace in the world, and consequently I have enemies, all those who would perpetuate anarchy and war. My life has been more than once attempted, but that is nothing. I am well guarded. I am not, I think, more of a coward than other men, and I am prepared to take my chance. But now I have been attacked by a subtler weapon, and I confess I have no defence. I had a son, who died ten years ago at college. My only

other child is my daughter, Adela, a girl of nineteen. She came to Europe just before Christmas, for she was to be married in Paris in April. A fortnight ago she was hunting with friends in Northamptonshire — the place is called Rushford Court. On the morning of the 8th of March she went for a walk to Rushford village to send a telegram, and was last seen passing through the lodge gates at twenty minutes past eleven. She has not been seen since."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, and rose from my chair.

Mr. Victor was looking out of the window, so I walked to the other end of the room and fiddled with the books on a shelf. There was silence for a second or two, till I broke it.

"Do you suppose it is loss of memory?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It is not loss of memory. I know — we have proof — that she has been kidnapped by those whom I call my enemies. She is being held as a hostage."

"You know she is alive?"

He nodded, for his voice was choking again. "There is evidence which points to a very deep and devilish plot. It may be revenge, but I think it more likely to be policy. Her captors hold her as security for their own fate."

"Has Scotland Yard done nothing?"

"Everything that man could do, but the darkness only grows thicker."

"Surely it has not been in the papers. I don't read them carefully but I could scarcely miss a thing like that."

"It has been kept out of the papers — for a reason which you will be told."

"Mr. Victor," I said, "I'm most deeply sorry for you. Like you, I've just the one child, and if anything of that

kind happened to him I should go mad. But I shouldn't take too gloomy a view. Miss Adela will turn up all right, and none the worse, though you may have to pay through the nose for it. I expect it's ordinary blackmail and ransom."

"No," he said very quietly. "It is not blackmail, and if it were, I would not pay the ransom demanded. Believe me, Sir Richard, it is a very desperate affair. More, far more is involved than the fate of one young girl. I am not going to touch on that side, for the full story will be told you later by one better equipped to tell it. But the hostage is my daughter, my only child. I have come to beg your assistance in the search for her."

"But I'm no good at looking for things," I stammered. "I'm most awfully sorry for you, but I don't see how I can help. If Scotland Yard is at a loss, it's not likely that an utter novice like me would succeed."

"But you have a different kind of imagination and a rarer kind of courage. I know what you have done before, Sir Richard. I tell you you are my last hope."

I sat down heavily and groaned. "I can't begin to explain to you the bottomless futility of your idea. It is quite true that in the War I had some queer jobs and was lucky enough to bring some of them off. But, don't you see, I was a soldier then, under orders, and it didn't greatly signify whether I lost my life from a crump in the trenches or from a private bullet on the backstairs. I was in the mood for any risk, and my wits were strung up and unnaturally keen. But that's all done with. I'm in a different mood now and my mind is weedy and grass-grown. I've settled so deep into the country that I'm just an ordinary hayseed farmer. If I took a hand—which I certainly won't—I'd only spoil the game."

I HEAR OF THE THREE HOSTAGES 19

Mr. Victor stood looking at me intently. I thought for a moment he was going to offer me money, and rather hoped he would, for that would have stiffened me like a ramrod, though it would have spoiled the good notion I had of him. The thought may have crossed his mind, but he was clever enough to reject it.

"I don't agree with a word you say about yourself, and I'm accustomed to size up men. I appeal to you as a Christian gentleman to help me to recover my child. I am not going to press that appeal, for I have already taken up enough of your time. My London address is on my card. Good-bye, Sir Richard, and believe me, I am very grateful to you for receiving me so kindly."

In five minutes he and his Rolls-Royce had gone, and I was left in a miserable mood of shame-faced exasperation. I realised how Mr. Julius Victor had made his fame. He knew how to handle men, for if he had gone on pleading he would only have riled me, whereas he had somehow managed to leave it all to my honour, and thoroughly unsettle my mind.

I went for a short walk, cursing the world at large, sometimes feeling horribly sorry for that unfortunate father, sometimes getting angry because he had tried to mix me up in his affairs. Of course I would not touch the thing; I couldn't; it was manifestly impossible; I had neither the capacity nor the inclination. I was not a professional rescuer of distressed ladies whom I did not know from Eve.

A man, I told myself, must confine his duties to his own circle of friends, except when his country has need of him. I was over forty, and had a wife and a young son to think of; besides, I had chosen a retired life, and had the right to have my choice respected. But I can't pretend that I

was comfortable. A hideous muddy wave from the outer world had come to disturb my little sheltered pool. I found Mary and Peter John feeding the swans, and couldn't bear to stop and play with them. The gardeners were digging in sulphates about the fig trees on the south wall, and wanted directions about the young chestnuts in the nursery; the keeper was lying in wait for me in the stable-yard for instructions about a new batch of pheasants' eggs, and the groom wanted me to look at the hocks of Mary's cob. But I simply couldn't talk to any of them. These were the things I loved, but for a moment the gilt was off them, and I would let them wait till I felt better. In a very bad temper I returned to the library.

I hadn't been there two minutes when I heard the sound of a car on the gravel. "Let 'em all come," I groaned, and I wasn't surprised when Paddock entered, followed by the spare figure and smooth keen face of Macgillivray.

I don't think I offered to shake hands. We were pretty good friends, but at that moment there was no one in the world I wanted less to see.

"Well, you old nuisance," I cried, "you're the second visitor from town I've had this morning. There'll be a shortage of petrol soon."

"Have you had a letter from Lord Artinswell?" he asked.

"I have, worse luck," I said.

"Then you know what I've come about. But that can keep till after luncheon. Hurry it up, Dick, like a good fellow, for I'm as hungry as a famished kestrel."

He looked rather like one, with his sharp nose and lean head. It was impossible to be cross for long with Macgillivray, so we went out to look for Mary.

I HEAR OF THE THREE HOSTAGES 21

"I may as well tell you," I told him, "that you've come on a fool's errand. I'm not going to be jockeyed by you or any one into making an ass of myself. Anyhow, don't mention the thing to Mary. I don't want her to be worried by your nonsense."

So at luncheon we talked about Fosse and the Cotswolds, and about the deer-forest I had taken — Machray they called it — and about Sir Archibald Roylance, my co-tenant, who had just had another try at breaking his neck in a steeplechase. Macgillivray was by way of being a great stalker and could tell me a lot about Machray. The crab of the place was its neighbours, it seemed; for Haripol on the south was too steep for the lessee, a middle-aged manufacturer, to do justice to it, and the huge forest of Glenaicill on the east was too big for any single tenant to shoot, and the Machray end of it was nearly thirty miles by road from the lodge. The result was, said Macgillivray, that Machray was surrounded by unauthorised sanctuaries, which made the deer easy to shift. He said the best time was early in the season when the stags were on the upper ground, for it seemed that Machray had uncommonly fine high pastures. . . . Mary was in good spirits, for somebody had been complimentary about Peter John, and she was satisfied for the moment that he wasn't going to be cut off by an early consumption. She was full of housekeeping questions about Machray, and revealed such spacious plans that Macgillivray said that he thought he would pay us a visit, for it looked as if he wouldn't be poisoned, as he usually was in Scotch shooting-lodges. It was a talk I should have enjoyed if there had not been that uneasy morning behind me and that interview I had still to get over.

There was a shower after luncheon, so he and I settled

ourselves in the library. "I must leave at 3.30," he said, "so I have got just a little more than an hour to tell you my business in."

"Is it worth while starting?" I asked. "I want to make it quite plain that under no circumstances am I open to any offer to take on any business of any kind. I'm having a rest and a holiday. I stay here for the summer and then I go to Machray."

"There's nothing to prevent your going to Machray in August," he said, opening his eyes. "The work I am going to suggest to you must be finished long before then."

I suppose that surprised me, for I did not stop him as I had meant to. I let him go on, and before I knew I found myself getting interested. I have a boy's weakness for a yarn, and Macgillivray knew this and played on it.

He began by saying very much what Dr. Greenslade had said the night before. A large part of the world had gone mad, and that involved the growth of inexplicable and unpredictable crime. All the old sanctities had become weakened, and men had grown too well accustomed to death and pain. This meant that the criminal had far greater resources at his command, and, if he were an able man, could mobilise a vast amount of utter recklessness and depraved ingenuity. The moral imbecile, he said, had been more or less a sport before the War; now he was a terribly common product, and throve in batches and battalions. Cruel, humourless, hard, utterly wanting in sense of proportion, but often full of a perverted poetry and drunk with rhetoric — a hideous, untamable breed had been engendered. You found it among the young Bolshevik Jews, among the young entry of the wilder Communist sects, and very notably among the sullen murderous hobbledheys in Ireland.

"Poor devils," Macgillivray repeated. "It is for their Maker to judge them, but we who are trying to patch up civilisation have to see that they are cleared out of the world. Don't imagine that they are devotees of any movement, good or bad. They are what I have called them, moral imbeciles, who can be swept into any movement by those who understand them. They are the neophytes and hierophants of crime. and it is as criminals that I have to do with them. Well, all this desperate degenerate stuff is being used by a few clever men who are not degenerates or anything of the sort, but only evil. There has never been such a chance for a rogue since the world began."

Then he told me certain facts, which must remain unpublished, at any rate during our life-times. The main point was that there were sinister brains at work to organise for their own purposes the perilous stuff lying about. All the contemporary anarchisms, he said, were interconnected, and out of the misery of decent folks and the agony of the wretched tools certain smug *entrepreneurs* were profiting. He and his men, and indeed the whole police force of civilisation—he mentioned especially the Americans—had been on the trail of one of the worst of these combines and by a series of fortunate chances had got their hand on it. Now at any moment they could stretch out that hand and gather it in.

But there was one difficulty. I learned from him that this particular combine was not aware of the danger in which it stood, but that it realised that it must stand in some danger, so it had taken precautions. Since Christmas it had acquired hostages.

Here I interrupted, for I felt rather incredulous about the whole business. "I think since the War we're all too

ready to jump at grandiose explanations of simple things. I'll want a good deal of convincing before I believe in your international clearing-house for crime."

"I guarantee the convincing," he said gravely. "You shall see all our evidence, and, unless you have changed since I first knew you, your conclusion won't differ from mine. But let us come to the hostages."

"One I know about," I put in. "I had Mr. Julius Victor here after breakfast."

Macgillivray exclaimed. "Poor soul! What did you say to him?"

"Deepest sympathy, but nothing doing."

"And he took that answer?"

"I won't say he took it. But he went away. What about the others?"

"There are two more. One is a young man, the heir to a considerable estate, who was last seen by his friends in Oxford on the seventeenth day of February, just before dinner. He was an undergraduate of Christ Church, and was living out of college in rooms in the High. He had tea at the Gridiron and went to his rooms to dress, for he was dining that night with the Halcyon Club. A servant passed him on the stairs of his lodgings, going up to his bedroom. He apparently did not come down, and since that day has not been seen. You may have heard his name — Lord Mercot."

I started. I had indeed heard the name, and knew the boy a little, having met him occasionally at our local steeplechases. He was the grandson and heir of the old Duke of Alcester, the most respected of the older statesmen of England.

"They have picked their bag carefully," I said. "What is the third case?"

"The cruelest of all. You know Sir Arthur Warcliff. He is a widower — lost his wife just before the war, and he has an only child, a little boy about ten years old. The child — David is his name — was the apple of his eye, and was at a preparatory school near Rye. The father took a house in the neighbourhood to be near him, and the boy used to be allowed to come home for luncheon every Sunday. One Sunday he came to luncheon as usual, and started back in the pony-trap. The boy was very keen about birds, and used to leave the trap and walk the last half-mile by a short cut across the marshes. Well, he left the groom at the usual gate, and, like Miss Victor and Lord Mercot, walked into black mystery."

This story really did horrify me. I remembered Sir Arthur Warcliff — the kind, worn face of the great soldier and administrator, and I could imagine his grief and anxiety. I knew what I should have felt if it had been Peter John. A much-travelled young woman and an athletic young man were defenceful creatures compared to a poor little round-headed boy of ten. But I still felt the whole affair too fantastic for real tragedy.

"But what right have you to connect the three cases?" I asked. "Three people disappear within a few weeks of each other in widely separated parts of England. Miss Victor may have been kidnapped for ransom, Lord Mercot may have lost his memory, and David Warcliff may have been stolen by tramps. Why should they be all part of one scheme? Why, for that matter, should any one of them have been the work of your criminal combine? Have you any evidence for the hostage theory?"

"Yes." Macgillivray took a moment or two to answer. "There is first the general probability. If a band of rascals wanted three hostages they could hardly find three

better — the daughter of the richest man in the world, the heir of our greatest dukedom, the only child of a national hero. There is also direct evidence.” Again he hesitated.

“Do you mean to say that Scotland Yard has not a single clue to any one of these cases?”

“We have followed up a hundred clues, but they have all ended in dead walls. Every detail, I assure you, has been gone through with a fine comb. No, my dear Dick, the trouble is not that we’re specially stupid on this side, but that there is some superlative cunning on the other. That is why I want *you*. You have a kind of knack of stumbling on truths which no amount of ordinary reasoning can get at. I have fifty men working day and night, and we have mercifully kept all the cases out of the papers, so that we are not hampered by the amateur. But so far it’s a blank. Are you going to help?”

“No, I’m not. But, supposing I were, I don’t see that you’ve a scrap of proof that the three cases are connected, or that any one of them is due to the criminal gang that you say you’ve got your hand on. You’ve only given me presumptions, and precious thin at that. Where’s your direct evidence?”

Macgillivray looked a little embarrassed. “I’ve started you at the wrong end,” he said. “I should have made you understand how big and desperate the thing is that we’re out against, and then you’d have been in a more receptive mood for the rest of the story. You know as well as I do that cold blood is not always the most useful accompaniment in assessing evidence. I said I had direct evidence of connection, and so I have, and the proof to my mind is certain.”

“Well, let’s see it.”

"It's a poem. On Wednesday of last week, two days after David Warcliff disappeared, Mr. Julius Victor, the Duke of Alcester, and Sir Arthur Warcliff received copies of it by the first post. They were typed on bits of flimsy paper, the envelopes had the addresses typed, and they had been posted in the West Central district of London the afternoon before."

He handed me a copy, and this was what I read:

"Seek where under midnight's sun
Laggard crops are hardly won; —
Where the sower casts his seed in
Furrows of the fields of Eden; —
Where beside the sacred tree
Spins the seer who cannot see."

I burst out laughing, for I could not help it — the whole thing was too preposterous. These six lines of indifferent doggerel seemed to me to put the coping-stone of nonsense on the business. But I checked myself when I saw Macgillivray's face. There was a slight flush of annoyance on his cheek, but for the rest it was grave, composed, and in deadly earnest. Now Macgillivray was not a fool, and I was bound to respect his beliefs. So I pulled myself together and tried to take things seriously.

"That's proof that the three cases are linked together," I said. "So much I grant you. But where's the proof that they are the work of the great criminal combine that you say you have got your hand on?"

Macgillivray rose and walked restlessly about the room. "The evidence is mainly presumptive, but to my mind it is certain presumption. You know as well as I do, Dick, that a case may be final and yet very difficult to set out as a series of facts. My view on the matter is made up of a large number of tiny indications and cross-bear-

ings, and I am prepared to bet that if you put your mind honestly to the business you will take the same view. But I'll give you this much by way of direct proof — in hunting the big show we had several communications of the same nature as this doggerel, and utterly unlike anything else I ever struck in criminology. There's one of the miscreants who amuses himself with sending useless clues to his adversaries. It shows how secure the gang thinks itself."

"Well, you've got that gang anyhow. I don't quite see why the hostages should trouble you. You'll gather them in when you gather in the malefactors."

"I wonder. Remember we are dealing with moral imbeciles. When they find themselves cornered they won't play for safety. They'll use their hostages, and when we refuse to bargain they'll take their last revenge on them."

I suppose I stared unbelievably, for he went on. "Yes. They'll murder them in cold blood — three innocent people — and then swing themselves with a lighter mind. I know the type. They've done it before." He mentioned one or two recent instances.

"Good God!" I cried. "It's a horrible thought! The only thing for you is to go canny, and not strike till you have got the victims out of their clutches."

"We can't," he said solemnly. "That is precisely the tragedy of the business. We must strike early in June. I won't trouble you with the reasons, but believe me, they are final. There is just a chance of a settlement in Ireland, and there are certain events of the first importance impending in Italy and America, and all depend upon the activities of the gang being at an end by midsummer. Do you grasp that? By midsummer we must stretch out our hand. By midsummer, unless they are released, the

three hostages will be doomed. It is a ghastly dilemma, but in the public interest there is only one way out. I ought to say that Victor and the Duke and Warcliff are aware of this fact, and accept the situation. They are big men, and will do their duty even if it breaks their hearts."

There was silence for a minute or two, for I did not know what to say. The whole story seemed to me incredible, and yet I could not doubt a syllable of it when I looked at Macgillivray's earnest face. I felt the horror of the business none the less because it seemed also partly unreal; it had the fantastic grimness of a nightmare. But most of all I realised that I was utterly incompetent to help, and as I understood that I could honestly base my refusal on incapacity and not on disinclination I began to feel more comfortable.

"Well," said Macgillivray, after a pause. "Are you going to help us?"

"There's nothing doing with that Sunday-paper anagram you showed me. That's the sort of riddle that's not meant to be guessed. I suppose you are going to try to work up from the information you have about the combine towards a clue to the hostages."

He nodded.

"Now, look here," I said. "You've got fifty of the quickest brains in Britain working at the job. They've found out enough to put a lasso round the enemy which you can draw tight whenever you like. They're trained to the work and I'm not. What on earth would be the use of an amateur like me butting in? I wouldn't be half as good as any one of the fifty. I'm not an expert, I'm not quick-witted, I'm a slow patient fellow, and this job, as you admit, is one that has to be done against time. If you

think it over, you'll see that it's sheer nonsense, my dear chap."

"You've succeeded before with worse material."

"That was pure luck, and it was in the War when, as I tell you, my mind was morbidly active. Besides, anything I did then I did in the field, and what you want me to do now is office-work. You know I'm no good at office-work — Blenkiron always said so, and Bullivant never used me on it. It isn't because I don't want to help, but because I can't."

"I believe you can. And the thing is so grave that I daren't leave any chance unexplored. Won't you come?"

"No. Because I could do nothing."

"Because you haven't a mind for it."

"Because I haven't the right kind of mind for it."

He looked at his watch and got up, smiling rather ruefully.

"I've had my say, and now you know what I want of you. I'm not going to take your answer as final. Think over what I've said, and let me hear from you within the next day or two."

But I had lost all my doubts, for it was very clear to me that on every ground I was doing the right thing.

"Don't delude yourself with thinking that I'll change my mind," I said, as I saw him into his car. "Honestly, old fellow, if I could be an atom of use I'd join you, but for your own sake you've got to count me out this time."

Then I went for a walk, feeling pretty cheerful. I settled the question of the pheasants' eggs with the keeper, and went down to the stream to see if there was any hatch of fly. It had cleared up to a fine evening, and I thanked my stars that I was out of a troublesome business with an easy conscience, and could enjoy my peaceful life again.

I say "with an easy conscience," for though there were little dregs of disquiet still lurking about the bottom of my mind, I had only to review the facts squarely to approve my decision. I put the whole thing out of my thoughts and came back with a fine appetite for tea.

There was a stranger in the drawing-room with Mary, a slim oldish man, very straight and erect, with one of those faces on which life has written so much that to look at them is like reading a good book. At first I didn't recognise him when he rose to greet me, but the smile that wrinkled the corners of his eyes and the slow deep voice brought back the two occasions in the past when I had run across Sir Arthur Warcliff. . . . My heart sank as I shook hands, the more as I saw how solemn was Mary's face. She had been hearing the story which I hoped she would never hear.

I thought it best to be very frank with him. "I can guess your errand, Sir Arthur," I said, "and I'm extremely sorry that you should have come this long journey to no purpose." Then I told him of the visits of Mr. Julius Victor and Macgillivray, and what they had said, and what had been my answer. I think I made it as clear as day that I could do nothing, and he seemed to assent. Mary, I remember, never lifted her eyes.

Sir Arthur had also looked at the ground while I was speaking, and now he turned his wise old face to me, and I saw what ravages his new anxiety had made in it. He could not have been much over sixty and he looked a hundred.

"I do not dispute your decision, Sir Richard," he said. "I know that you would have helped me if it had been possible. But I confess I am sorely disappointed, for you were my last hope. You see — you see — I had nothing

left in the world but Davie. If he had died I think I could have borne it, but to know nothing about him and to imagine terrible things is almost too much for my fortitude."

I have never been through a more painful experience. To hear a voice falter that had been used to command, to see tears in the steadfastest eyes that ever looked on the world, made me want to howl like a dog. I would have given a thousand pounds to be able to bolt into the library and lock the door.

Mary appeared to me to be behaving very oddly. She seemed to have the deliberate purpose of probing the wound, for she encouraged Sir Arthur to speak of his boy. He showed us a miniature he carried with him — an extraordinarily handsome child with wide grey eyes and his head most nobly set upon his shoulders. A grave little boy, with the look of utter trust which belongs to children who have never in their lives been unfairly treated. Mary said something about the gentleness of the face.

"Yes, Davie was very gentle," his father said. "I think he was the gentlest thing I have ever known. That little boy was the very flower of courtesy. But he was curiously stoical, too. When he was distressed, he only shut his lips tight, and never cried. I used often to feel rebuked by him."

And then he told us about Davie's performances at school, where he was not distinguished, except as showing a certain talent for cricket. "I am very much afraid of precocity," Sir Arthur said with the ghost of a smile. "But he was always educating himself in the right way, learning to observe and think." It seemed that the boy was a desperately keen naturalist and would be out at all hours watching wild things. He was a great fisherman

too, and had killed a lot of trout with the fly on hill burns in Galloway. And as the father spoke I suddenly began to realise the little chap, and to think that he was just the kind of boy I wanted Peter John to be. I liked the stories of his love of nature and trout streams. It came on me like a thunderclap that if I were in his father's place I should certainly go mad, and I was amazed at the old man's courage.

"I think he had a kind of genius for animals," Sir Arthur said. "He knew the habits of birds by instinct, and used to talk of them as other people talk of their friends. He and I were great cronies, and he would tell me long stories in his little quiet voice of birds and beasts he had seen on his walks. He had odd names for them too. . . ."

The thing was almost too pitiful to endure. I felt as if I had known the child all my life, I could see him playing, I could hear his voice, and as for Mary she was unashamedly weeping.

Sir Arthur's eyes were dry now, and there was no catch in his voice as he spoke. But suddenly a sharper flash of realisation came on him and his words became a strained cry: "Where is he now? What are they doing to him? Oh, God! My beloved little man — my gentle little Davie!"

That fairly finished me. Mary's arm was round the old man's neck, and I saw that he was trying to pull himself together, but I didn't see anything clearly. I only know that I was marching about the room, scarcely noticing that our guest was leaving. I remember shaking hands with him, and hearing him say that it had done him good to talk to us. It was Mary who escorted him to the car, and when she returned it was to find me blaspheming like

a Turk at the window. I had flung the thing open, for I felt suffocated, though the evening was cool. The mixture of anger and disgust and pity in my heart nearly choked me.

"Why the devil can't I be left alone?" I cried. "I don't ask for much — only a little peace. Why in Heaven's name should I be dragged into other people's business? Why on earth —"

Mary was standing at my elbow, her face rather white and tear-stained.

"Of course you are going to help," she said.

Her words made clear to me the decision which I must have taken a quarter of an hour before, and all the passion went out of me like wind out of a pricked bladder.

"Of course," I answered. "By the way, I had better telegraph to Macgillivray. And Warcliff too. What's his address?"

"You needn't bother about Sir Arthur," said Mary. "Before you came in — when he told me the story — I said he could count on you. Oh, Dick, think if it had been Peter John!"

CHAPTER III

RESEARCHES IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS

I WENT to bed in the perfect certainty that I wouldn't sleep. That happened to me about once a year, when my mind was excited or angry, and I knew no way of dodging it. There was a fine moon, and the windows were sheets of opal cut by the dark jade limbs of trees; light winds were stirring the creepers; owls hooted like sentries exchanging pass-words, and sometimes a rook would talk in its dreams; the little odd squeaks and rumbles of wild life came faintly from the woods; while I lay staring at the ceiling with my thoughts running round about in a futile circus. Mary's even breathing tantalised me, for I never knew any one with her perfect gift for slumber. I used to say that if her pedigree could be properly traced it would be found that she descended direct from one of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus who married one of the Foolish Virgins.

What kept me wakeful was principally the thought of that poor little boy, David Warcliff. I was sorry for Miss Victor and Lord Mercot, and desperately sorry for the parents of all three, but what I could not stand was the notion of the innocent little chap, who loved birds and fishing and the open air, hidden away in some stuffy den by the worst kind of blackguards. The thing preyed on me till I got to think it had happened to us and that Peter John was missing. I rose and prowled about the windows, looking out at the quiet night, and wondering how the same world could contain so much trouble and so much peace.

I laved my face with cold water and lay down again. It was no good letting my thoughts race, so I tried to fix them on one point in the hope that I would get drowsy. I endeavoured to recapitulate the evidence which Macgillivray had recited, but only made foolishness of it, for I simply could not concentrate. I saw always the face of a small boy, who bit his lips to keep himself from tears, and another perfectly hideous face that kept turning into one of the lead figures in the rose garden. A ridiculous rhyme too ran in my head — something about the “midnight sun” and the “fields of Eden.” By and by I got it straightened out into the anagram business Macgillivray had mentioned. I have a fly-paper memory for verse when there is no reason why I should remember it, and I found I could repeat the six lines of the doggerel.

After that I found the lines mixing themselves up, and suggesting all kinds of odd pictures to my brain. I took to paraphrasing them — “Under the midnight sun, where harvests are poor”— that was Scandinavia anyhow, or maybe Iceland or Greenland or Labrador. Who on earth was the sower who sowed in the fields of Eden? Adam, perhaps, or Abel, who was the first farmer? Or an angel in heaven? More like an angel, I thought, for the line sounded like a hymn. Anyhow it was infernal nonsense.

The last two lines took to escaping me, and that made me force my mind out of the irritable confusion in which it was bogged. Ah! I had them again:

“Where beside the sacred tree
Spins the seer who cannot see.”

The sacred tree was probably Yggdrasil and the spinner one of the Norns. I had once taken an interest in Norse mythology, but I couldn't remember whether one of the

Norns was blind. A blind woman spinning. Now where had I heard something like that? Heard it quite recently, too?

The discomfort of wakefulness is that you are not fully awake. But now I was suddenly in full possession of my senses, and worrying at that balderdash like a dog at a bone. I had been quite convinced that there was a clue in it, but that it would be impossible to hit on the clue. But now I had a ray of hope, for I seemed to feel a very faint and vague flavour of reminiscence.

Scandinavian harvests, the fields of Eden, the blind spinner — oh, it was maddening, for every time I repeated them the sense of having recently met with something similar grew stronger. The North — Norway — surely I had it there! Norway — what was there about Norway? — Salmon, elk, reindeer, midnight sun, *saeters* — the last cried out to me. And the blind old woman that spun!

I had it. These were two of the three facts which Dr. Greenslade had suggested the night before as a foundation for his imaginary “shocker.” What was the third? A curiosity shop in North London kept by a Jew with a dyed beard. That had no obvious connection with a sower in the fields of Eden. But at any rate he had got two of them identical with the doggerel. . . . It was a clue. It must be a clue. Greenslade had somewhere and somehow heard the jingle or the substance of it, and it had sunk into the subconscious memory he had spoken of, without his being aware of it. Well, I had got to dig it out. If I could discover where and how he had heard the thing, I had struck a trail.

When I had reached this conclusion, I felt curiously easier in my mind, and almost at once fell asleep. I awoke

to a gorgeous spring morning, and ran down to the lake for my bath. I felt that I wanted all the freshening and screwing up I could get, and when I dressed after an icy plunge I was ready for all comers.

Mary was down in time for breakfast, and busy with her letters. She spoke little, and seemed to be waiting for me to begin; but I didn't want to raise the matter which was uppermost in our minds till I saw my way clearer, so I said I was going to take two days to think things over. It was Wednesday, so I wired to Macgillivray to expect me in London on Friday morning, and I scribbled a line to Mr. Julius Victor. By half-past nine I was on the road making for Greenslade's lodgings.

I caught him in the act of starting on his rounds, and made him sit down and listen to me. I had to give him the gist of Macgillivray's story, with extracts from those of Victor and Sir Arthur. Before I was halfway through he had flung off his overcoat, and before I had finished he had lit a pipe, which was a breach of his ritual not to smoke before the evening. When I stopped he had that wildish look in his light eyes which you see in a cairn terrier's when he is digging out a badger.

"You've taken on this job?" he asked brusquely.

I nodded.

"Well, I shouldn't have had much respect for you if you had refused. How can I help? Count on me, if I'm any use. Good God! I never heard a more damnable story."

"Have you got hold of the rhyme?" I repeated it, and he said it after me.

"Now, you remember the talk we had after dinner the night before last. You showed me how a 'shocker' was written, and you took at random three facts as the foun-

dition. They were, you remember, a blind old woman spinning in the Western Highlands, a *saeter* in Norway, and a curiosity shop in North London, kept by a Jew with a dyed beard. Well, two of your facts are in that six-line jingle I have quoted to you."

"That is an odd coincidence. But is it anything more?"

"I believe that it is. I don't hold with coincidences. There's generally some explanation which we're not clever enough to get at. Your inventions were so odd that I can't think they were mere inventions. You must have heard them somehow and somewhere. You know what you said about your subconscious memory. They're somewhere in it, and, if you can remember just how they got there, you'll give me the clue I want. That six-line rhyme was sent in by people who were so confident that they didn't mind giving their enemies a clue — only it was a clue which they knew could never be discovered. Macgillivray and his fellows can make nothing of it — never will. But if I can start from the other end I'll get in on their rear. Do you see what I mean? I'm going to make you somehow or other dig it out."

He shook his head. "It can't be done, Dick. Admitting your premise — that I heard the nonsense and didn't invent it — the subconscious can't be handled like a business proposition. I remember unconsciously and I can't recall consciously. . . . But I don't admit your premise. I think the whole thing is common coincidence."

"I don't," I said stubbornly, "and even if I did I'm bound to assume the contrary, for it's the only card I possess. You've got to sit down, old chap, and do your damndest to remember. You've been in every kind of odd show, and my belief is that you *heard* that nonsense.

Dig it out of your memory and we've a chance to win. Otherwise, I see nothing but tragedy."

He got up and put on his overcoat. "I've got a long round of visits which will take me all day. Of course I'll try, but I warn you that I haven't the ghost of a hope. These things don't come by care and searching. I'd better sleep at the Manor to-night. How long can you give me?"

"Two days—I go up to town on Friday morning. Yes, you must take up your quarters with us. Mary insists on it."

There was a crying of young lambs from the meadows and through the open window came the sound of the farm-carts jolting from the stackyard into the lane. Greenslade screwed up his face and laughed.

"A nasty breach in your country peace, Dick. You know I'm with you if there's any trouble going. Let's get the thing clear, for there's a lot of researching ahead of me. My three were an old blind woman spinning in the Western Highlands—Western Highlands was it?—a *saeter* barn, and a Jew curiosity shop. The other three were a blind spinner under a sacred tree, a *saeter* of sorts, and a sower in the fields of Eden—Lord, such rot! Two pairs seem to coincide, the other pair looks hopeless. Well, here goes for fortune! I'm going to break my rule and take my pipe with me, for this business demands tobacco."

I spent a busy day writing letters and making arrangements about the Manor, for it looked as if I might be little at home for the next months. Oddly enough, I felt no restlessness or any particular anxiety. That would come later; for the moment I seemed to be waiting on Providence in the person of Tom Greenslade. I was trusting

my instinct which told me that in those random words of his there was more than coincidence, and that with luck I might get from them a line on our problem.

Greenslade turned up about seven in the evening, rather glum and preoccupied. At dinner he ate nothing, and when we sat afterwards in the library he seemed to be chiefly interested in reading the advertisements in the "Times." When I asked "What luck?" he turned on me a disconsolate face.

"It is the most futile job I ever took on," he groaned. "So far it's an absolute blank, and anyhow I've been taking the wrong line. I've been trying to *think* myself into recollection, and, as I said, this thing comes not by searching, nor yet by prayer and fasting. It occurred to me that I might get at something by following up the differences between the three pairs. It's a familiar method in inductive logic, for differences are often more suggestive than resemblances. So I worried away at the 'sacred tree' as contrasted with the 'Western Highlands' and the 'fields of Eden' as set against the curiosity shop. No earthly good. I gave myself a headache and I daresay I've poisoned half my patients. It's no use, Dick, but I'll peg away for the rest of the prescribed two days. I'm letting my mind lie fallow now and trusting to inspiration. I've got two faint glimmerings of notions. First, I don't believe I said 'Western Highlands.'"

"I'm positive those were your words. What did you say, then?"

"Hanged if I know, but I'm pretty certain it wasn't that. I can't explain properly, but you get an atmosphere about certain things in your mind and that phrase somehow jars with the atmosphere. Different key. Wrong tone. Second, I've got a hazy intuition that the

thing, if it is really in my memory, is somehow mixed up with a hymn tune. I don't know what tune, and the whole impression is as vague as smoke, but I tell it you for what it is worth. If I could get the right tune, I might remember something."

"You've stopped thinking?"

"Utterly. I'm an Æolian harp to be played on by any wandering wind. You see, if I did hear these three things there is no conscious rational clue to it. They were never part of my workaday mind. The only chance is that some material phenomenon may come along and link itself with them and so rebuild the scene where I heard them. A scent would be best, but a tune might do. Our one hope — and it's about as strong as a single thread of gossamer on the grass — is that that tune may drift into my head. You see the point, Dick? Thought won't do, for the problem doesn't concern the mind, but some tiny physical sensation of nose, ear, or eye might press the button. Now, it may be hallucination, but I've a feeling that the three facts I thought I invented were in some infinitely recondite way connected with a hymn tune."

He went to bed early, while I sat up till nearly midnight writing letters. As I went upstairs, I had a strong sense of futility and discouragement. It seemed the merest trifling to be groping among these spectral unrealities, while tragedy, as big and indisputable as a mountain, was overhanging us. I had to remind myself how often the trivial was the vital before I got rid of the prick in my conscience. I was tired and sleepy, and as I forced myself to think of the immediate problem, the six lines of the jingle were all blurred. While I undressed I tried to repeat them, but could not get the fourth to scan. It came out as "fields of Erin," and after that "the green fields

of Erin." Then it became "the green fields of Eden."

I found myself humming a tune.

It was an old hymn which the Salvation Army used to play in the Cape Town streets when I was a schoolboy. I hadn't heard it or thought of it for thirty years. But I remembered the tune very clearly, a pretty, catchy thing like an early Victorian drawing-room ballad, and I remembered the words of the chorus —

"On the other side of Jordan
In the green fields of Eden,
Where the Tree of Life is blooming
There is rest for you."

I marched off to Greenslade's room and found him lying wide awake staring at the ceiling, with the lamp by his bedside lit. I must have broken in on some train of thought, for he looked at me crossly.

"I've got your tune," I said, and I whistled it, and then quoted what words I remembered.

"Tune be blowed," he said. "I never heard it before." But he hummed it after me, and made me repeat the words several times.

"No good, I'm afraid. It doesn't seem to hank on to anything. Lord, this is a fool's game. I'm off to sleep."

But three minutes later came a knock at my dressing-room door, and Greenslade entered. I saw by his eyes that he was excited.

"It's the tune all right. I can't explain why, but those three blessed facts of mine fit into it like prawns in an aspic. I'm feeling my way towards the light now. I thought I'd just tell you, for you may sleep better for hearing it."

I slept like a log, and went down to breakfast feeling more cheerful than I had felt for several days. But the

doctor seemed to have had a poor night. His eyes looked gummy and heavy, and he had ruffled his hair out of all hope of order. I knew that trick of his; when his hair began to stick up at the back he was out of sorts either in mind or body. I noticed that he had got himself up in knickerbockers and thick shoes.

After breakfast he showed no inclination to smoke. "I feel as if I were going to be beaten on the post," he groaned. "I'm a complete convert to your view, Dick. I *heard* my three facts and didn't invent them. What's more, my three are definitely linked with the three in those miscreants' doggerel. That tune proves it, for it talks about the 'fields of Eden,' and yet is identified in my memory with my three which didn't mention Eden. That's a tremendous point and proves we're on the right road. But I'm hanged if I can get a step farther. Wherever I heard the facts I heard the tune, but I'm no nearer finding out that place. I've got one bearing, and I need a second to give me the point of intersection I want, and how the deuce I'm to get it I don't know."

Greenslade was now keener even than I was on the chase, and indeed his lean anxious face was uncommonly like an old hound's. I asked him what he was going to do.

"At ten o'clock precisely I start on a walk — right round the head of the Windrush and home by the Forest. It's going to be a thirty-mile stride at a steady four and a half miles an hour, which, with half an hour for lunch, will get me back here before six. I'm going to drug my body and mind into apathy by hard exercise. Then I shall have a hot bath and a good dinner, and after that, when I'm properly fallow, I may get the revelation. The mistake I made yesterday was in trying to *think*."

It was a gleamy blustering March morning, the very

weather for a walk, and I would have liked to accompany him. As it was I watched his long legs striding up the field we call Big Pasture, and then gave up the day to the job of putting Loch Leven fry into one of the ponds — a task so supremely muddy and wet that I had very little leisure to think of other things. In the afternoon I rode over to the market-town to see my builder, and got back only just before dinner to learn that Greenslade had returned. He was now wallowing in a hot bath, according to his programme.

At dinner he seemed to be in better spirits. The wind had heightened his colour, and given him a ferocious appetite, and the 1906 Clicquot, which I regard as the proper drink after a hard day, gave him the stimulus he needed. He talked as he had talked three nights ago, before this business got us in its clutches. Mary disappeared after dinner, and we sat ourselves in big chairs before the library fire, like two drowsy men who have had a busy day in the open air. I thought I had better say nothing till he chose to speak.

He was silent for a long time, and then he laughed not very mirthfully.

"I'm as far off it as ever. All day I've been letting my mind wander and measuring off miles with my two legs like a pair of compasses. But nothing has come to me. No word yet of that confounded cross-bearing I need. I might have heard that tune in any one of a thousand parts of the globe. You see, my rackety life is a disadvantage — I've had too many different sorts of experience. If I'd been a curate all my days in one village it would have been easier."

I waited, and he went on, speaking not to me but to the fire.

"I've got an impression so strong that it amounts to certainty that I never heard the words 'Western Highlands.' It was something like it, but not that."

"Western Islands," I suggested.

"What could they be?"

"I think I've heard the phrase used about the islands off the west coast of Ireland. Does that help you?"

He shook his head. "No good. I've never been in Ireland."

After that he was silent again, staring at the fire, while I smoked opposite him, feeling pretty blank and dispirited. I realised that I had banked more than I knew on this line of inquiry which seemed to be coming to nothing. . . .

Then suddenly there happened one of those trivial things which look like accidents but I believe are part of the reasoned government of the universe.

I leaned forward to knock out the ashes of my pipe against the stone edge of the hearth. I hammered harder than I intended, and the pipe, which was an old one, broke off at the bowl. I exclaimed irritably, for I hate to lose an old pipe, and then pulled up sharp at the sight of Greenslade.

He was staring open-mouthed at the fragments in my hand, and his eyes were those of a man whose thoughts are far away. He held up one hand, while I froze into silence. Then the tension relaxed, and he dropped back into his chair with a sigh.

"The cross-bearing!" he said. "I've got it. . . . Medina."

Then he laughed at my puzzled face.

"I'm not mad, Dick. I once talked to a man, and as we talked he broke the bowl of his pipe as you have just

done. He was the man who hummed the hymn tune, and though I haven't the remotest recollection of what he said, I am as certain as that I am alive that he gave me the three facts which sunk into the abyss of my subconscious memory. Wait a minute. Yes. I see it as plain as I see you. He broke his pipe just as you have done, and some time or other he hummed that tune."

"Who was he?" I asked, but Greenslade disregarded the question. He was telling his story in his own way, with his eyes still abstracted as if he were looking down a long corridor of memory.

"I was staying at the Bull at Hanham — shooting wild-fowl on the sea marshes. I had the place to myself, for it wasn't weather for a country pub, but late one night a car broke down outside, and the owner and his chauffeur had to put up at the Bull. Oddly enough I knew the man. He had been at one of the big shoots at Rousham Thorpe and was on his way back to London. We had a lot to say to each other and sat up into the small hours. We talked about sport, and the upper glens of the Yarkand river, where I first met him. I remember quite a lot of our talk, but not the three facts or the tune, which made no appeal to my conscious memory. Only of course they must have been there."

"When did this happen?"

"Early last December, the time we had the black frost. You remember, Dick, how I took a week's holiday and went down to Norfolk after duck."

"You haven't told me the man's name."

"I have. Medina."

"Who on earth is Medina?"

"O Lord! Dick. You're overdoing the rustic. You've heard of Dominick Medina."

I had, of course, when he mentioned the Christian name. You couldn't open a paper without seeing something about Dominick Medina, but whether he was a poet or a politician or an actor-manager I hadn't troubled to inquire. There was a pile of picture-papers on a side-table, and I fetched them and began to turn them over. Very soon I found what I wanted. It was a photograph of a group at a country-house party for some steeple-chase, the usual "reading-from-left-to-right" business, and there between a Duchess and a foreign Princess was Mr. Dominick Medina. The poverty of the photograph could not conceal the extraordinary good looks of the man. He had the kind of head I fancy Byron had, and I seemed to discern, too, a fine, clean, athletic figure.

"If you had happened to look at that rag you might have short-circuited your inquiry."

He shook his head. "No. It doesn't happen that way. I had to get your broken pipe and the tune or I would have been stuck."

"Then I suppose I have to get in touch with this chap and find where he picked up the three facts and the tune. But how if he turns out to be like you, another babbler from the subconscious?"

"That is the risk you run, of course. He may be able to help you, or more likely he may prove only another dead wall."

I felt suddenly an acute sense of the difficulty of the job I had taken on, and something very near hopelessness.

"Tell me about this Medina. Is he a decent fellow?"

"I suppose so. Yes, I should think so. But he moves in higher circles than I'm accustomed to, so I can't judge. But I'll tell you what he is beyond doubt — he's rather a great man. Hang it, Dick, you must have heard of him.

He's one of the finest shots living, and he's done some tall things in the exploration way, and he was the devil of a fellow as a partisan leader in South Russia. Also — though it may not interest you — he's an uncommon fine poet."

"I suppose he's some sort of a Dago."

"Not a bit of it. Old Spanish family settled here for three centuries. One of them rode with Rupert. Hold on! I rather believe I've heard that his people live in Ireland, or did live, till life there became impossible."

"What age?"

"Youngish. Not more than thirty-five. Oh, and the handsomest thing in mankind since the Greeks."

"I'm not a flapper," I said impatiently. "Good looks in a man are no sort of recommendation to me. I shall probably take a dislike to his face."

"You won't. From what I know of him and you you'll fall under his charm at first sight. I never heard of a man that didn't. He has a curious musical voice and eyes that warm you — glow like sunlight. Not that I know him well, but I own I found him extraordinarily attractive. And you see from the papers what the world thinks of him."

"All the same I'm not much nearer my goal. I've got to find out where he heard those three blessed facts and that idiotic tune. He'll probably send me to blazes, and, even if he's civil, he'll very likely be helpless."

"Your chance is that he's a really clever man, not an old blunderer like me. You'll get the help of a first-class mind, and that means a lot. Shall I write you a line of introduction?"

He sat down at my desk and wrote. "I'm saying nothing about your errand — simply that I'd like you to know

each other — common interest in sport and travel — that sort of thing. You're going to be in London, so I had better give your address as your club."

Next morning Greenslade went back to his duties and I caught the early train to town. I was not very happy about Mr. Dominick Medina, for I didn't seem able to get hold of him. "Who's Who" gave only his age, his residence — Hill Street, his clubs, and the fact that he was M.P. for a South London division. Mary had never met him, for he had appeared in London after she had stopped going about, but she remembered that her Wymondham aunts raved about him, and she had read somewhere an article on his poetry. As I sat in the express, I tried to reconstruct what kind of fellow he must be — a mixture of Byron and Sir Richard Burton and the young political highbrow. The picture wouldn't compose, for I saw only a figure like a waxwork, with a cooing voice and a shop-walker's suavity. Also his name kept confusing me, for I mixed him up with an old ruffian of a Portugee I once knew at Beira.

I was walking down Saint James's Street on my way to Whitehall, pretty much occupied with my own thoughts, when I was brought up by a hand placed flat on my chest. and lo! and behold! it was Sandy Arbuthnot.

CHAPTER IV

I MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A POPULAR MAN

YOU may imagine how glad I was to see old Sandy again, for I had not set eyes on him since 1916. He had been an Intelligence Officer with Maude, and then something at Simla, and after the war had had an administrative job in Mesopotamia, or, as they call it nowadays, Iraq. He had written to me from all kinds of queer places, but he never appeared to be coming home, and, what with my marriage and my settling in the country, we seemed to be fixed in ruts that were not likely to intersect. I had seen his elder brother's death in the papers, so he was now Master of Clanroyden and heir to the family estates, but I didn't imagine that that would make a Scotch laird of him. I never saw a fellow less changed by five years of toil and travel. He was desperately slight and tanned — he had always been that, but the contours of his face were still soft like a girl's, and his brown eyes were merry as ever.

We stood and stared at each other.

"Dick, old man," he cried, "I'm home for good. Yes — honour bright. For months and months if not years and years. I've got so much to say to you I don't know where to begin. But I can't wait now. I'm off to Scotland to see my father. He's my chief concern now, for he's getting very frail. But I'll be back in three days. Let's dine together on Tuesday."

We were standing at the door of a club — his and mine — and a porter was stowing his baggage into a taxi. Be-

fore I could properly realise that it was Sandy, he was waving his hand from the taxi window and disappearing up the street.

The sight of him cheered me immensely and I went on along Pall Mall in a good temper. To have Sandy back in England and at call made me feel somehow more substantial, like a commander who knows his reserves are near. When I entered Macgillivray's room I was smiling, and the sight of me woke an answering smile on his anxious face. "Good man!" he said. "You look like business. You're to put yourself at my disposal while I give you your bearings."

He got out his papers and expounded the whole affair. It was a very queer story, yet the more I looked into it the thinner my scepticism grew. I am not going to write it all down, for it is not yet time; it would give away certain methods which have not yet exhausted their usefulness; but before I had gone very far, I took off my hat to these same methods, for they showed amazing patience and ingenuity. It was an odd set of links that made up the chain. There was an importer of Barcelona nuts with a modest office near Tower Hill. There was a copper company, purporting to operate in Spain, whose shares were not quoted on the Stock Exchange, but which had a fine office in London Wall, where you could get the best luncheon in the City. There was a respectable accountant in Glasgow, and a French count, who was also some kind of Highland laird and a great supporter of the White Rose League. There was a country gentleman living in Shropshire, who had bought his place after the War and was a keen rider to hounds and a very popular figure in the county. There was a little office not far from Fleet Street, which professed to be the English agency of an American

religious magazine; and there was a certain publicist, who was always appealing in the newspapers for help for the distressed populations of Central Europe. I remembered his appeals well, for I had myself twice sent him small subscriptions. The way Macgillivray had worked out the connection between these gentry filled me with awe.

Then he showed me specimens of their work. It was sheer unmitigated crime, a sort of selling a bear on a huge scale in a sinking world. The aim of the gang was money, and already they had made scandalous profits. Partly their business was mere conscienceless profiteering well inside the bounds of the law, such as gambling in falling exchanges and using every kind of brazen and subtle trick to make their gamble a certainty. Partly it was common fraud of the largest size. But there were darker sides — murder when the victim ran athwart their schemes, strikes engineered when a wrecked industry somewhere or other in the world showed symptoms of reviving, shoddy little outbursts in shoddy little countries which increased the tangle. These fellows were wreckers on the grand scale, merchants of pessimism, giving society another kick downhill whenever it had a chance of finding its balance, and then pocketing their profits.

Their motive, as I have said, was gain, but that was not the motive of the people they worked through. Their cleverness lay in the fact that they used the fanatics, the moral imbeciles as Macgillivray called them, whose key was a wild hatred of something or other, or a reasoned belief in anarchy. Behind the smug exploiters lay the whole dreary wastes of half-baked craziness. Macgillivray gave me examples of how they used these tools, the fellows who had no thought of profit, and were ready to sacrifice everything, including their lives, for a mad ideal.

It was a masterpiece of cold-blooded devilish ingenuity. Hideous, and yet comic too; for the spectacle of these feverish cranks toiling to create a new heaven and a new earth and thinking themselves the leaders of mankind, when they were dancing like puppets at the will of a few scoundrels engaged in the most ancient of pursuits, was an irony to make the gods laugh.

I asked who was their leader.

Macgillivray said he wasn't certain. No one of the gang seemed to have more authority than the others, and their activities were beautifully specialised. But he agreed that there was probably one master mind, and said grimly that he would know more about that when they were rounded up. "The dock will settle that question."

"How much do they suspect?" I asked.

"Not much. A little, or they would not have taken hostages. But not much, for we have been very careful to make no sign. Only, since we became cognisant of the affair, we have managed very quietly to put a spoke in the wheels of some of their worst enterprises, though I am positive they have no suspicion of it. Also we have put the brake on their propaganda side. They are masters of propaganda, you know. Dick, have you ever considered what a diabolical weapon that can be — using all the channels of modern publicity to poison and warp men's minds? It is the most dangerous thing on earth. You can use it cleanly — as I think on the whole we did in the War — but you can also use it to establish the most damnable lies. Happily in the long run it defeats itself, but only after it has sown the world with mischief. Look at the Irish! They are the cleverest propagandists extant, and managed to persuade most people that they were a

brave, generous, humorous, talented, warm-hearted race, cruelly yoked to a dull mercantile England, when God knows they were exactly the opposite."

Macgillivray, I may remark, is an Ulsterman, and has his prejudices.

"About the gang — I suppose they're all pretty respectable to outward view?"

"Highly respectable," he said. "I met one of them at dinner the other night at ——'s" — he mentioned the name of a member of the Government. "Before Christmas I was at a cover shoot in Suffolk, and one of the worst had the stand next me — an uncommonly agreeable fellow."

Then we sat down to business. Macgillivray's idea was that I should study the details of the thing and then get alongside some of the people. He thought I might begin with the Shropshire squire. He fancied that I might stumble on something which would give me a line on the hostages, for he stuck to his absurd notion that I had a special *flair* which the amateur sometimes possessed and the professional lacked. I agreed that that was the best plan, and arranged to spend Sunday in his room going over the secret *dossiers*. I was beginning to get keen about the thing, for Macgillivray had a knack of making whatever he handled as interesting as a game.

I had meant to tell him about my experiments with Greenslade; but after what he had shown me I felt that that story was absurdly thin and unpromising. But as I was leaving, I asked him casually if he knew Mr. Dominick Medina.

He smiled. "Why do you ask? He's scarcely your line of country."

"I don't know. I've heard a lot about him and I thought I would rather like to meet him."

"I barely know him, but I must confess that the few times I've met him I was enormously attracted. He's the handsomest being alive."

"So I'm told, and it's the only thing that puts me off."

"It wouldn't if you saw him. He's not in the least the ordinary *matinée* idol. He is the only fellow I ever heard of who was adored by women and also liked by men. He's a first-class sportsman and said to be the best shot in England after His Majesty. He's a coming man in politics, too, and a most finished speaker. I once heard him, and, though I take very little stock in oratory, he almost had me on my feet. He has knocked a bit about the world, and he is also a very pretty poet, though that wouldn't interest you."

"I don't know why you say that," I protested. "I'm getting rather good at poetry."

"Oh, I know. Scott and Macaulay and Tennyson. But that is not Medina's line. He is a deity of *les jeunes* and a hardy innovator. Jolly good, too. The man's a fine classical scholar."

"Well, I hope to meet him soon, and I'll let you know my impression."

I had posted my letter to Medina, enclosing Greenslade's introduction, on my way from the station, and next morning I found a very civil reply from him at my club. Greenslade had talked of our common interest in big-game shooting, and he professed to know all about me, and to be anxious to make my acquaintance. He was out of town unfortunately for the week-end, he said, but he suggested that I should lunch with him on the Monday. He named a club, a small, select, old-fashioned one of which most of the members were hunting squires.

I looked forward to meeting him with a quite inexplica-

ble interest and on Sunday, when I was worrying through papers in Macgillivray's room, I had him at the back of my mind. I had made a picture of something between a Ouida guardsman and the Apollo Belvedere and rigged it out in the smartest clothes. But when I gave my name to the porter at the club door, and a young man who was warming his hands at the hall fire came forward to meet me, I had to wipe that picture clean off my mind.

He was about my own height, just under six feet, and at first sight rather slightly built, but a hefty enough fellow to eyes which knew where to look for the points of a man's strength. Still he appeared slim, and therefore young, and you could see from the way he stood and walked that he was as light on his feet as a rope-dancer. There is a horrible word in the newspapers, "well-groomed," applied to men by lady journalists, which always makes me think of a glossy horse on which a stable-boy has been busy with the brush and curry-comb. I had thought of him as "well-groomed," but there was nothing glossy about his appearance. He wore a rather old well-cut brown tweed suit, with a soft shirt and collar, and a russet tie that matched his complexion. His get-up was exactly that of a country squire who has come up to town for a day at Tattersalls'. And I thought.

I find it difficult to describe my first impression of his face, for my memory is all overlaid with other impressions acquired when I looked at it in very different circumstances. But my chief feeling, I remember, was that it was singularly pleasant. It was very English, and yet not quite English; the colouring was a little warmer than sun or weather would give, and there was a kind of silken graciousness about it not commonly found in our countrymen. It was beautifully cut, every feature regular, and

yet there was a touch of ruggedness that saved it from conventionality. I was puzzled about this, till I saw that it came from two things, the hair and the eyes. The hair was a dark brown, brushed in a wave above the forehead, so that the face with its strong fine chin made an almost perfect square. But the eyes were the thing. They were of a startling blue, not the pale blue which is common enough and belongs to our Norse ancestry, but a deep dark blue, like the colour of a sapphire. Indeed if you think of a sapphire with the brilliance of a diamond, you get a pretty fair notion of those eyes. They would have made a plain-headed woman lovely, and in a man's face, which had not a touch of the feminine, they were startling. Startling — I stick to that word — but also entrancing.

He greeted me as if he had been living for this hour, and also with a touch of the deference due to a stranger.

"This is delightful, Sir Richard. It was very good of you to come. We've got a table to ourselves by the fire. I hope you're hungry. I've had a devilish cold journey this morning and I want my luncheon."

I was hungry enough and I never ate a better meal. He gave me Burgundy on account of the bite in the weather, and afterwards I had a glass of the Bristol Cream for which the club was famous; but he drank water himself. There were four other people in the room, all of whom he appeared to call by their Christian names, and these lantern-jawed hunting fellows seemed to cheer up at the sight of him. But they didn't come and stand beside him and talk, which is apt to happen to your popular man. There was that about Medina which was at once friendly and aloof, the air of a simple but tremendous distinction.

I remember we began by talking about rifles. I had done a good deal of shikar in my time, and I could see that this man had had a wide experience and had the love of the thing in his bones. He never bragged, but by little dropped remarks showed what a swell he was. We talked of a new .240 bore which had remarkable stopping power, and I said I had never used it on anything more formidable than a Scotch stag. "It would have been a god-send to me in the old days on the Pungwe where I had to lug about a .500 express that broke my back."

He grinned ruefully. "The old days!" he said. "We've all had 'em, and we're all sick to get 'em back. Sometimes I'm tempted to kick over the traces and be off to the wilds again. I'm too young to settle down. And you, Sir Richard — you must feel the same. Do you never regret that that beastly old War is over?"

"I can't say I do. I'm a middle-aged man now and soon I'll be stiff in the joints. I've settled down in the Cotswolds, and though I hope to get a lot of sport before I die I'm not looking for any more wars. I'm positive the Almighty meant me for a farmer."

He laughed. "I wish I knew what He meant me for. It looks like some sort of politician."

"Oh, you!" I said. "You're the fellow with twenty talents. I've only got the one, and I'm jolly well going to bury it in the soil."

I kept wondering how much help I would get out of him. I liked him enormously, but somehow I didn't yet see his cleverness. He was just an ordinary good fellow of my own totem — just such another as Tom Greenslade. It was a dark day, and the firelight silhouetted his profile, and as I stole glances at it I was struck by the shape of his head. The way he brushed his hair front and back

made it look square, but I saw that it was really round, the roundest head I have ever seen except in a Kaffir. He was evidently conscious of it and didn't like it, so took some pains to conceal it.

All through luncheon I was watching him covertly, and I could see that he was also taking stock of me. Very friendly these blue eyes were, but very shrewd. He suddenly looked me straight in the face.

"You won't vegetate," he said. "You needn't deceive yourself. You haven't got the kind of mouth for a rustic. What is it to be? Politics? Business? Travel? You're well off?"

"Yes. For my simple tastes I'm rather rich. But I haven't the ambition of a maggot."

"No. You haven't." He looked at me steadily. "If you don't mind my saying it, you have too little vanity. Oh, I'm quick at detecting vanity, and anyhow it's a thing that defies concealment. But I imagine — indeed I know — that you can work like a beaver, and that your loyalty is not the kind that cracks. You won't be able to help yourself, Sir Richard. You'll be caught up in some machine. Look at me. I swore two years ago never to have a groove, and I'm in a deep one already. England is made up of grooves, and the only plan is to select a good one."

"I suppose yours is politics," I said.

"I suppose it is. A dingy game as it's played at present, but there are possibilities. There is a mighty Tory revival in sight, and it will want leading. The newly enfranchised classes, especially the women, will bring it about. The suffragists didn't know what a tremendous force of conservatism they were releasing when they won the vote for their sex. I should like to talk to you about these things some day."

In the smoking-room we got back to sport and he told me the story of how he met Greenslade in Central Asia. I was beginning to realise that the man's reputation was justified, for there was a curious mastery about his talk, a careless power as if everything came easily to him and was just taken in his stride. I had meant to open up the business which had made me seek his acquaintance, but I did not feel the atmosphere quite right for it. I did not know him well enough yet, and I felt that if I once started on those ridiculous three facts, which were all I had, I must make a clean breast of the whole thing and take him fully into my confidence. I thought the time was scarcely ripe for that, especially as we would meet again.

"Are you by any chance free on Thursday?" he asked as we parted. "I would like to take you to dine at the Thursday Club. You're sure to know some of the fellows, and it's a pleasant way of spending an evening. That's capital! Eight o'clock on Thursday. Short coat and black tie."

As I walked away, I made up my mind that I had found the right kind of man to help me. I liked him, and the more I thought of him the more the impression deepened of a big reservoir of power behind his easy grace. I was completely fascinated, and the proof of it was that I went off to the nearest bookseller's and bought his two slim volumes of poems. I cared far more about poetry than Macgillivray imagined — Mary had done a lot to educate me — but I hadn't been very fortunate in my experiments with the new people. But I understood Medina's verses well enough. They were very simple, with a delicious subtle tune in them, and they were desperately sad. Again and again came the note of regret and transience and disillusioned fortitude. As I read them that evening

I wondered how a man, who had apparently such zest for life and got so much out of the world, should be so lonely at heart. It might be a pose, but there was nothing of the conventional despair of the callow poet. This was the work of one as wise as Ulysses and as far-wandering. I didn't see how he could want to write anything but the truth. A pose is a consequence of vanity, and I was pretty clear that Medina was not vain.

Next morning I found his cadences still running in my head and I could not keep my thoughts off him. He fascinated me, as a man is fascinated by a pretty woman. I was glad to think that he had taken a liking for me, for he had done far more than Greenslade's casual introduction demanded. He had made a plan for us to meet again, and he had spoken not as an acquaintance but as a friend. Very soon I decided that I would get Macgillivray's permission and take him wholly into our confidence. It was no good keeping a man like that at arm's length and asking him to solve puzzles presented as meaninglessly as an acrostic in a newspaper. He must be told all or nothing, and I was certain that if he were told all he would be a very tower of strength to me. The more I thought of him the more I was convinced of his exceptional brains.

I lunched with Mr. Julius Victor in Carlton House Terrace. He was carrying on his ordinary life, and when he greeted me he never referred to the business which had linked us together. Or rather he only said one word. "I knew I could count on you," he said. "I think I told you that my daughter was engaged to be married this spring. Well, her fiancé has come over from France and will be staying for an indefinite time with me. He can probably do nothing to assist you, but he is here at your call if you want him. He is the Marquis de la Tour du Pin."

I didn't quite catch the name, and, as it was a biggish party, we had sat down to luncheon before I realised who the desolated lover was. It was my ancient friend Turpin, who had been liaison officer with my old division. I had known that he was some kind of grandee, but as everybody went by nicknames I had become used to think of him as Turpin, a version of his title invented, I think, by Archie Roylance. There he was, sitting opposite me, a very handsome pallid young man, dressed with that excessive correctness found only among Frenchmen who get their clothes in England. He had been a tremendous swashbuckler when he was with the division, unbridled in speech, volcanic in action, but always with a sad gentleness in his air. He raised his heavy-lidded eyes and looked at me, and then, with a word of apology to his host, marched round the table and embraced me.

I felt every kind of a fool, but I was mighty glad all the same to see Turpin. He had been a good pal of mine, and the fact that he had been going to marry Miss Victor seemed to bring my new job in line with other parts of my life. But I had no further speech with him, for I had conversational women on both sides of me, and in the few minutes while the men were left alone at table I fell into talk with an elderly man on my right, who proved to be a member of the Cabinet. I found that out by a lucky accident, for I was lamentably ill-informed about the government of our country.

I asked him about Medina and he brightened up at once.

"Can you place him?" he asked. "I can't. I like to classify my fellow-men, but he is a new specimen. He is as exotic as the young Disraeli and as English as the late Duke of Devonshire. The point is, has he a policy, some-

thing he wants to achieve, and has he the power of attaching a party to him? If he has these two things, there is no doubt about his future. Honestly, I'm not quite certain. He has very great talents, and I believe if he wanted he would be in the front rank as a public speaker. He has the ear of the House, too, though he doesn't often address it. But I am never sure how much he cares about the whole business, and England, you know, demands whole-heartedness in her public men. She will follow blindly the second-rate if he is in earnest, and reject the first-rate if he is not."

I said something about Medina's view of a great Tory revival, based upon the women. My neighbour grinned.

"I dare say he's right, and I dare say he could whistle women any way he pleased. It's extraordinary the charm he has for them. That handsome face of his and that melodious voice would enslave anything female from a charwoman to a Cambridge intellectual. Half his power of course comes from the fact that they have no charm for *him*. He's as aloof as Sir Galahad from any interest in the sex. Did you ever hear his name coupled with a young woman's? He goes everywhere and they would give their heads for him, and all the while he is as insensitive as a nice Eton boy whose only thought is of getting into the Eleven. You know him?"

I told him, very slightly.

"Same with me. I've only a nodding acquaintance, but one can't help feeling the man everywhere and being acutely interested. It's lucky he's a sound fellow. If he were a rogue he could play the devil with our easy-going society."

That night Sandy and I dined together. He had come back from Scotland in good spirits, for his father's health

was improving, and when Sandy was in good spirits it was like being on the Downs in a southwest wind. We had so much to tell each other that we let our food grow cold. He had to hear all about Mary and Peter John, and what I knew of Blenkinsop and a dozen other old comrades, and I had to get a sketch — the merest sketch — of his doings since the Armistice in the East. Sandy for some reason was at the moment disinclined to speak of his past, but he was as ready as an undergraduate to talk of his future. He meant to stay at home now, **for** a long spell at any rate; and the question was how he should fill up his time. "Country life's no good," he said. "I must find a profession or I'll get into trouble."

I suggested politics, and he rather liked the notion.

"I might be bored in Parliament," he reflected, "but I should love the rough-and-tumble of an election. I only once took part in one, and I discovered surprising gifts as a demagogue, and made a speech in our little town which is still talked about. The chief row was about Irish Home Rule, and I thought I'd better have a whack at the Pope. Has it ever struck you, Dick, that ecclesiastical language has a most sinister sound? I knew some of the words, though not their meaning, but I knew that my audience would be just as ignorant. So I had a magnificent peroration. 'Will you, men of Kilclavers,' I asked, 'endure to see a chasuble set up in your market-place? Will you have your daughters sold into simony? Will you have celibacy practised in the public streets?' Gad, I had them all on their feet bellowing 'Never!'"

He also rather fancied business. He had a notion of taking up civil aviation, and running a special service for transporting pilgrims from all over the Moslem world to Mecca. He reckoned the present average cost to the pil-

grim at not less than thirty pounds, and believed that he could do it for an average of fifteen pounds and show a handsome profit. Blenkiron, he thought, might be interested in the scheme and put up some of the capital.

But later, in a corner of the upstairs smoking-room, Sandy was serious enough when I began to tell him the job I was on, for I didn't need Macgillivray's permission to make a confidant of him. He listened in silence while I gave him the main lines of the business that I had gathered from Macgillivray's papers, and he made no comment when I came to the story of the three hostages. But, when I explained my disinclination to stir out of my country rut, he began to laugh.

"It's a queer thing how people like us get a sudden passion for cosiness. I feel it myself coming over me. What stirred you up in the end? The little boy?"

Then very lamely and shyly I began on the rhymes and Greenslade's memory. That interested him acutely. "Just the sort of sensible-nonsensical notion you'd have, Dick. Go on. I'm thrilled."

But when I came to Medina he exclaimed sharply.

"You've met him?"

"Yesterday at luncheon."

"You haven't told him anything?"

"No. But I'm going to."

Sandy had been deep in an armchair with his legs over the side, but now he got up and stood with his arms on the mantelpiece looking into the fire.

"I'm going to take him into my full confidence," I said, "when I've spoken to Macgillivray."

"Macgillivray will no doubt agree?"

"And you? Have you ever met him?"

"Never. But of course I've heard of him. Indeed I

don't mind telling you that one of my chief reasons for coming home was a wish to see Medina."

"You'll like him tremendously. I never met such a man."

"So every one says." He turned his face and I could see that it had fallen into that portentous gravity which was one of Sandy's moods, the complement to his ordinary insouciance. "When are you going to see him again?"

"I'm dining with him the day after to-morrow at a thing called the Thursday Club."

"Oh, he belongs to that, does he? So do I. I think I'll give myself the pleasure of dining also."

I asked about the Club, and he told me that it had been started after the War by some of the people who had had queer jobs and wanted to keep together. It was very small, only twenty members. There were Collatt, one of the Q-boat V.C.'s, and Pugh of the Indian Secret Service, and the Duke of Burminster, and Sir Arthur Wardcliff, and several soldiers all more or less well known. "They elected me in 1919," said Sandy, "but of course I've never been to a dinner. I say, Dick, Medina must have a pretty strong pull here to be a member of the Thursday. Though I says it as shouldn't, it's a show most people would give their right hand to be in."

He sat down again and appeared to reflect, with his chin on his hand.

"You're under the spell, I suppose," he said.

"Utterly. I'll tell you how he strikes me. Your ordinary very clever man is apt to be a bit bloodless and priggish, while your ordinary sportsman and good fellow is inclined to be a bit narrow. Medina seems to me to combine all the virtues and none of the faults of both kinds.

Anybody can see he's a sportsman, and you've only to ask the swells to discover how high they put his brains."

"He sounds rather too good to be true." I seemed to detect a touch of acidity in his voice. "Dick," he said, looking very serious, "I want you to promise to go slow in this business — I mean about telling Medina."

"Why?" I asked. "Have you anything against him?"

"No—o—o," he said. "I haven't anything against him. But he's just a little incredible, and I would like to know more about him. I had a friend who knew him. I've no right to say this, and I haven't any evidence, but I've a sort of feeling that Medina didn't do him any good."

"What was his name?" I asked and was told "Lavater"; and when I inquired what had become of him Sandy didn't know. He had lost sight of him for two years.

At that I laughed heartily, for I could see what was the matter. Sandy was jealous of this man who was putting a spell on everybody. He wanted his old friends to himself. When I taxed him with it he grinned and didn't deny it.

CHAPTER V

THE THURSDAY CLUB

WE met in a room on the second floor of a little restaurant in Mervyn Street, a pleasant room, panelled in white, with big fires burning at each end. The Club had its own cook and butler, and I swear a better dinner was never produced in London, starting with preposterously early plovers' eggs, and finishing with fruit from Burminster's houses. There were a dozen present including myself, and of these, besides my host, I knew only Burminster and Sandy. Collatt was there, and Pugh, and a wizened little man who had just returned from bird-hunting at the mouth of the Mackenzie. There was Palliser-Yeates, the banker, who didn't look thirty, and Fulleylove, the Arabian traveller, who was really thirty and looked fifty. I was specially interested in Nightingale, a slim peering fellow with double glasses, who had gone back to Greek manuscripts and his Cambridge fellowship after captaining a Bedouin tribe. Leithen was there, too, the Attorney-General, who had been a private in the Guards at the start of the War and had finished up a G.S.O.I., a toughly built man, with a pale face and very keen quizzical eyes. I should think there must have been more varied and solid brains in that dozen than you would find in an average Parliament.

Sandy was the last to arrive, and was greeted with a roar of joy. Everybody seemed to want to wring his hand and beat him on the back. He knew them all except Medina, and I was curious to see their meeting. Burminster

did the introducing, and Sandy for a moment looked shy. "I've been looking forward to this for years," Medina said, and Sandy, after one glance at him, grinned sheepishly and stammered something polite.

Burminster was chairman for the evening, a plump, jolly little man, who had been a pal of Archie Roylance in the Air Force. The talk to begin with was nothing out of the common. It started with horses and the spring handicaps, and then got on to spring salmon-fishing, for one man had been on the Helmsdale, another on the Naver, and two on the Tay. The fashion of the Club was to have the conversation general, and there was very little talking in groups. I was next to Medina, between him and the Duke, and Sandy was at the other end of the oval table. He had not much to say, and more than once I caught his eyes watching Medina.

Then by and by, as was bound to happen, reminiscences began. Collatt made me laugh with a story of how the Admiralty had a notion that sea-lions might be useful to detect submarines. A number were collected, and trained to swim after submarines to which fish were attached as bait, the idea being that they would come to associate the smell of submarines with food, and go after a stranger. The thing shipwrecked on the artistic temperament. The beasts all came from the music-halls and had names like Flossie and Cissie, so they couldn't be got to realise that there was a war on, and were always going ashore without leave.

That story started the ball rolling, and by the time we had reached the port the talk was like what you used to find in the smoking-room of an East African coastal steamer, only a million times better. Everybody present had done and seen amazing things, and moreover they

had the brains and knowledge to orientate their experiences. It was no question of a string of yarns, but rather of the best kind of give-and-take conversation, when a man would buttress an argument by an apt recollection. I especially admired Medina. He talked little, but he made others talk, and his keen interest seemed to wake the best in everybody. I noticed that, as at our luncheon three days before, he drank only water.

We talked, I remember, about the people who had gone missing, and whether any were likely still to turn up. Sandy told us about three British officers who had been in prison in Turkestan since the summer of '18 and had only just started home. He had met one of them at Marseilles, and thought there might be others tucked away in those parts. Then some one spoke of how it was possible to drop off the globe for a bit and miss all that was happening. I said I had met an old prospector in Barberton in 1902 who had come down from Portuguese territory and when I asked him what he had been doing in the War, he said, "What war?" Pugh said a fellow had just turned up in Hong Kong, who had been a captive of Chinese pirates for eight years and had never heard a word of our four years' struggle, till he said something about the Kaiser to the skipper of the boat that picked him up.

Then Sandy, as the newcomer, wanted news about Europe. I remember that Leithen gave him his views on the *malaise* that France was suffering from, and that Palliser-Yeates, who looked exactly like a rugby three-quarter back, enlightened him — and incidentally myself — on the matter of German reparations. Sandy was furious about the muddle in the Near East and the mis-handling of Turkey. His view was that we were doing

our best to hammer a much-divided Orient into a hostile unanimity.

"Lord!" he cried, "how I loathe our new manners in foreign policy. The old English way was to regard all foreigners as slightly childish and rather idiotic and ourselves as the only grown-ups in a kindergarten world. That meant that we had a cool detached view and did even-handed unsympathetic justice. But now we have got into the nursery ourselves and are bear-fighting on the floor. We take violent sides, and make pets, and of course if you are *-phil* something or other you have got to be *-phobe* something else. It is all wrong. We are becoming Balkanised."

We would have drifted into politics, if Pugh had not asked him his opinion of Gandhi. That led him into an exposition of the meaning of the fanatic, a subject on which he was well qualified to speak, for he had consorted with most varieties.

"He is always in the technical sense mad — that is, his mind is tilted from its balance, and since we live by balance he is a wrecker, a crowbar in the machinery. His power comes from the appeal he makes to the imperfectly balanced, and as these are never the majority his appeal is limited. But there is one kind of fanatic whose strength comes from balance, from a lunatic balance. You cannot say that there is any one thing abnormal about him, for he is all abnormal. He is as balanced as you or me, but, so to speak, in a fourth-dimensional world. That kind of man has no logical gaps in his creed. Within his insane postulates he is brilliantly sane. Take Lenin for instance. That's the kind of fanatic I'm afraid of."

Leithen asked how such a man got his influence. "You say that there is no crazy spot in him which appeals to a crazy spot in other people."

"He appeals to the normal," said Sandy solemnly, "to the perfectly sane. He offers reason, not visions — in any case his visions are reasonable. In ordinary times he will not be heard, because, as I say, his world is not our world. But let there come a time of great suffering or discontent, when the mind of the ordinary man is in desperation, and the rational fanatic will come by his own. When he appeals to the sane and the sane respond, revolutions begin."

Pugh nodded his head, as if he agreed. "Your fanatic of course must be a man of genius."

"Of course. And genius of that kind is happily rare. When it exists, its possessor is the modern wizard. The old necromancer fiddled away with cabalistic signs and crude chemicals and got nowhere; the true wizard is the man who works by spirit on spirit. We are only beginning to realise the strange crannies of the human soul. The real magician, if he turned up to-day, wouldn't bother about drugs and dopes. He would dabble in far more deadly methods, the compulsion of a fiery nature over the limp things that men call their minds."

He turned to Pugh. "You remember the man we used to call Ram Dass in the War — I never knew his right name?"

"Rather," said Pugh. "The fellow who worked for us in San Francisco. He used to get big sums from the agitators and pay them in to the British Exchequer, less his commission of ten per cent."

"Stout fellow!" Burminster exclaimed approvingly.

"Well, Ram Dass used to discourse to me on this subject. He was as wise as a serpent and as loyal as a dog, and he saw a lot of things coming that we are just beginning to realise. He said that the great offensives of the future would be psychological, and he thought the Gov-

ernments should get busy about it and prepare their defence. What a jolly sight it would be — all the high officials sitting down to little primers! But there was sense in what he said. He considered that the most deadly weapon in the world was the power of mass-persuasion, and he wanted to meet it at the source, by getting at the mass-persuader. His view was that every spell-binder had got something like Samson's hair which was the key of his strength, and that if this were tampered with he could be made innocuous. He would have had us make pets of the prophets and invite them to Government House. You remember the winter of 1917 when the Bolsheviks were making trouble in Afghanistan and their stuff was filtering through into India. Well, Ram Dass claimed the credit of stopping that game by his psychological dodges."

He looked across suddenly at Medina. "You know the Frontier. Did you ever come across the *guru* that lived at the foot of the Shansi pass as you go over to Kaikand?"

Medina shook his head. "I never travelled that way. Why?"

Sandy seemed disappointed. "Ram Dass used to speak of him. I hoped you might have met him."

The club madeira was being passed round, and there was a little silence while we sipped it. It was certainly a marvellous wine, and I noticed with pain Medina's abstinence.

"You really are missing a lot, you know," Burminster boomed in his jolly voice, and for a second all the company looked Medina's way.

He smiled and lifted his glass of water,

"*Sit vini abstemius qui hermeneuma tentat aut hominum petit dominatum,*" he said.

Nightingale translated. "Meaning that you must be pussyfoot if you would be a big man."

There was a chorus of protests, and Medina again lifted his glass.

"I'm only joking. I haven't a scrap of policy or principle in the matter. I don't happen to like the stuff — that's all."

I fancy that the only two scholars among us were Nightingale and Sandy. I looked at the latter and was surprised by the change in his face. It had awakened to the most eager interest. His eyes, which had been staring at Medina, suddenly met mine, and I read in them not only interest but disquiet.

Burminster was delivering a spirited defence of Bacchus, and the rest joined in, but Sandy took the other side.

"There's a good deal in that Latin tag," he said. "There are places in the world where total abstinence is reckoned a privilege. Did you ever come across the Ulai tribe up the Karakoram way?" He was addressing Medina. "No? Well, the next time you meet a man in the Guides ask him about them, for they're a curiosity. They're Mahommedan and so should by rights be abstainers, but they're a drunken set of sweeps and the most priest-ridden community on earth. Drinking is not only a habit among them, it's an obligation, and their weekly *tamasha* would make Falstaff take the pledge. But their priests — they're a kind of theocracy — are strict teetotal. It is their privilege and the secret of their power. When one of them has to be degraded he is filled compulsorily full of wine. That's your — how does the thing go? — your '*hominum dominatus*.'"

From that moment I found the evening go less pleas-

antly. Medina was as genial as ever, but something seemed to have affected Sandy's temper and he became positively grumpy. Now and then he contradicted a man too sharply for good manners, but for the most part he was silent, smoking his pipe and answering his neighbours in monosyllables. About eleven I began to feel it was time to leave, and Medina was of the same opinion. He asked me to walk with him, and I gladly accepted, for I did not feel inclined to go to bed.

As I was putting on my coat, Sandy came up. "Come to the Club, Dick," he said. "I want to talk to you." His manner was so peremptory that I opened my eyes.

"Sorry," I said. "I've promised to walk home with Medina."

"Oh, damn Medina!" he said. "Do as I ask or you'll be sorry for it."

I wasn't feeling very pleased with Sandy, especially as Medina was near enough to hear what he said. So I told him rather coldly that I didn't intend to go back on my arrangement. He turned and marched out, cannoning at the doorway into Burminster, to whom he did not apologise. That nobleman rubbed his shoulder ruefully. "Old Sandy hasn't got used to his corn yet," he laughed. "Looks as if the madeira had touched up his liver."

It was a fine still March night with a good moon, and as we walked along Piccadilly I was feeling cheerful. The good dinner I had eaten and the good wine I had drunk played their part in this mood, and there was also the satisfaction of having dined with good fellows and having been admitted into pretty select company. I felt my liking for Medina enormously increase, and I had the unworthy sense of superiority which a man gets from seeing an old friend whom he greatly admires behave rather

badly. I was considering what had ailed Sandy when Medina raised the subject.

"A wonderful fellow Arbuthnot," he said. "I have wanted to meet him for years, and he is certainly up to my expectations. But he has been quite long enough abroad. A mind as keen as his, if it doesn't have the company of its equals, is in danger of getting viewy. What he said to-night was amazingly interesting, but I thought it a little fantastic."

I agreed, but the hint of criticism was enough to revive my loyalty. "All the same there's usually something in his most extravagant theories. I've seen him right when all the sober knowledgeable people were wrong."

"That I can well believe," he said. "You know him well?"

"Pretty well. We've been in some queer places together."

The memory of those queer places came back to me as we walked across Berkeley Square. The West End of London at night always affected me with a sense of the immense solidity of our civilisation. These great houses, lit and shuttered and secure, seemed the extreme opposite of the world of half-lights and perils in which I had sometimes journeyed. I thought of them as I thought of Fosse Manor, as sanctuaries of peace. But to-night I felt differently towards them. I wondered what was going on at the back of those heavy doors. Might not terror and mystery lurk behind that barricade as well as in tent and slum? I suddenly had a picture of a plump face all screwed up with fright muffled beneath the bed-clothes.

I had imagined that Medina lived in chambers or a flat, but we stopped before a substantial house in Hill Street.

"You're coming in? The night's young and there's time for a pipe."

I had no wish to go to bed, so I followed him as he opened the front door with a latch-key. He switched on a light, which lit the first landing of the staircase but left the hall in dusk. It seemed to be a fine place full of cabinets, the gilding of which flickered dimly. We ascended thickly carpeted stairs, and on the landing he switched off the first light and switched on another which lit a further flight. I had the sensation of mounting to a great height in a queer shadowy world.

"This is a big house for a bachelor," I observed.

"I've a lot of stuff, books and pictures and things, and I like it round me."

He opened a door and ushered me into an enormous room, which must have occupied the whole space on that floor. It was oblong, with deep bays at each end, and it was lined from floor to ceiling with books. Books, too, were piled on the tables, and sprawled on a big flat couch which was drawn up before the fire. It wasn't an ordinary gentleman's library, provided by the bookseller at so much a yard. It was the working collection of a scholar, and the books had that used look which makes them the finest tapestry for a room. The place was lit with lights on small tables, and on a big desk under a reading lamp were masses of papers and various volumes with paper slips in them. It was workshop as well as library.

A servant entered, unsummoned, and put a tray of drinks on a side table. He was dressed like an ordinary butler, but I guessed that he had not spent much of his life in service. The heavy jowl, the small eyes, the hair cut straight round the nape of the neck, the swollen muscles about the shoulder and upper arm told me the pro-

fession he had once followed. The man had been in the ring, and not so very long ago. I wondered at Medina's choice, for a pug is not the kind of servant I would choose myself.

"Nothing more, Odell," said Medina. "You can go to bed. I will let Sir Richard out."

He placed me in a long armchair, and held the syphon while I mixed myself a very weak whisky-and-soda. Then he sat opposite me across the hearth-rug in a tall old-fashioned chair which he pulled forward from his writing-table. The servant in leaving had turned out all the lights except one at his right hand, which vividly lit up his face, and which, since the fire had burned low, made the only bright patch in the room.

I stretched my legs comfortably and puffed at my pipe, wondering how I would have the energy to get up and go home. The long dim shelves, where creamy vellum and morocco ran out of the dusk into darkness, had an odd effect on me. I was visited again by the fancies which had occupied me coming through Berkeley Square. I was inside one of those massive sheltered houses, and lo and behold! it was as mysterious as the aisles of a forest. Books — books — old books full of forgotten knowledge! I was certain that if I had the scholarship to search the grave rows I would find out wonderful things.

I was thirsty, so I drank off my whisky-and-soda, and was just adding a little more soda-water from the syphon at my elbow, when I looked towards Medina. There was that in his appearance which made me move my glass so that a thin stream of liquid fell on my sleeve. The patch was still damp next morning.

His face, brilliantly lit up by the lamp, seemed to be also lit from within. It was not his eyes or any one fea-

ture that enthralled me, for I did not notice any details. Only the odd lighting seemed to detach his head from its environment so that it hung in the air like a planet in the sky, full of intense brilliance and power.

It was not very easy to write down what happened. For twelve hours afterwards I remembered nothing — only that I had been very sleepy, and must have been poor company and had soon got up to go. . . . But that was not the real story: it was what the man had willed that I should remember, and because my own will was not really mastered I remembered other things in spite of him; remembered them hazily, like a drunkard's dream.

The head seemed to swim in the centre of pale converging lines. These must have been the book-shelves, which in that part of the room were full of works bound in old vellum. My eyes were held by two violet pin-points of light which were so bright that they hurt me. I tried to shift my gaze, but I could only do that by screwing round my head towards the dying fire. The movement demanded a great effort, for every muscle in my body seemed drugged with lethargy.

As soon as I looked away from the light I regained some possession of my wits. I felt that I must be in for some sickness, and had a moment of bad fright. It seemed to be my business to keep my eyes on the shadows in the hearth, for where darkness was there I found some comfort. I was as afraid of the light before me as a child of a bogey. I thought that if I said something I should feel better, but I didn't seem to have the energy to get a word out. Curiously enough I felt no fear of Medina; he didn't seem to be in the business; it was that disembodied light that scared me.

Then I heard a voice speaking, but still I didn't think of Medina.

"Hannay," it said. "You are Richard Hannay?"

Against my will I slewed my eyes round, and there hung that intolerable light burning into my eyeballs and my soul. I found my voice now, for it seemed to be screwed out of me, and I said "Yes" like an automaton.

I felt my wits and my senses slipping away under that glare. But my main discomfort was physical, the flaming control of the floating brightness — not face, or eyes, but a dreadful overmastering aura. I thought — if at that moment you could call any process of my mind thought — that if I could only link it on to some material thing I should find relief. With a desperate effort I seemed to make out the line of a man's shoulder and the back of a chair. Let me repeat that I never thought of Medina, for he had been wiped clean out of my world.

"You are Richard Hannay," said the voice. "Repeat, 'I am Richard Hannay.'"

The words came out of my mouth involuntarily. I was concentrating all my wits on the comforting outline of the chair-back, which was beginning to be less hazy.

The voice spoke again.

"But till this moment you have been nothing. There was no Richard Hannay before. Now, when I bid you, you begin your life. You remember nothing. You have no past."

"I remember nothing," said my voice, but as I spoke I knew I lied, and that knowledge was my salvation.

I have been told more than once by doctors who dabbled in the business that I was the most hopeless subject for hypnotism that they ever struck. One of them once said that I was about as unsympathetic as Table Moun-

tain. I must suppose that the intractable bedrock of commonplaceness in me now met the something which was striving to master me and repelled it. I felt abominably helpless, my voice was not my own, my eyes were tortured and aching, but I had recovered my mind.

I seemed to be repeating a lesson at some one's dictation. I said I was Richard Hannay, who had just come from South Africa on his first visit to England. I knew no one in London, and had no friends. Had I heard of a Colonel Arbuthnot? I had not. Or the Thursday Club? I had not. Or the War? Yes, but I had been in Angola most of the time and had never fought. I had money? Yes, a fair amount, which was in such-and-such a bank and such-and-such investments. . . . I went on repeating the stuff as glibly as a parrot, but all the while I knew I lied. Something deep down in me was insisting that I was Sir Richard Hannay, K.C.B., who had commanded a division in France, and was the squire of Fosse Manor, the husband of Mary, and the father of Peter John.

Then the voice seemed to give orders. I was to do this and that, and I repeated them docilely. I was no longer in the least scared. Some one or something was trying to play monkey-tricks with my mind, but I was master of that, though my voice seemed to belong to an alien gramophone, and my limbs were stupidly weak. I wanted above all things to be allowed to sleep. . . .

I think I must have slept for a little, for my last recollection of that queer sederunt is that the unbearable light had gone, and the ordinary lamps of the room were switched on. Medina was standing by the dead fire, and another man beside him — a slim man with a bent back and a lean grey face. The second man was only there for a moment, but he looked at me closely and I thought

Medina spoke to him and laughed. . . . Then I was being helped by Medina into my coat, and conducted downstairs. There were two bright lights in the street which made me want to lie down on the kerb and sleep. . . .

I woke about ten o'clock next morning in my bedroom at the Club, feeling like nothing on earth. I had a bad headache, my eyes seemed to be backed with white fire, and my legs were full of weak pains as if I had influenza. It took me several minutes to realise where I was, and when I wondered what had brought me to such a state I could remember nothing. Only a preposterous litany ran in my brain — the name "Dr. Newhover," and an address in Wimpole Street. I concluded glumly that that for a man in my condition was a useful recollection, but where I had got it I hadn't an idea.

The events of the night before were perfectly clear. I recalled every detail of the Thursday Club dinner, Sandy's brusqueness, my walk back with Medina, my admiration of his great library. I remembered that I had been drowsy there and thought that I had probably bored him. But I was utterly at a loss to account for my wretched condition. It could not have been the dinner; or the wine, for I had not drunk much, and in any case I have a head like cast iron; or the weak whisky-and-soda in Medina's house. I staggered to my feet and looked at my tongue in the glass. It was all right, so there could be nothing the matter with my digestion.

You are to understand that the account I have just written was pieced together as events came back to me, and that at 10 A.M. the next morning I remembered nothing of it — nothing but the incidents up to my sitting down in Medina's library, and the name and address of a

doctor I had never heard of. I concluded that I must have got some infernal germ, probably botulism, and was in for a bad illness. I wondered dismally what kind of fool I had made of myself before Medina, and still more dismally what was going to happen to me. I decided to wire for Mary when I had seen a doctor, and to get as soon as possible into a nursing home. I had never had an illness in my life, except malaria, and I was as nervous as a cat.

But after I had had a cup of tea I felt a little better, and inclined to get up. A cold bath relieved my headache, and I was able to shave and dress. It was while I was shaving that I observed the first thing which made me puzzle about the events of the previous evening. The valet who attended to me had put out the contents of my pockets on the dressing-table—my keys, watch, loose silver, notecase, and my pipe and pouch. Now I carry my pipe in a little leather case, and, being very punctilious in my habits, I invariably put it back in the case when it is empty. But the case was not there, though I remembered laying it on the table beside me in Medina's room, and moreover the pipe was still half full of unsmoked tobacco. I rang for the man, and learned that he had found the pipe in the pocket of my dinner jacket, but no case. He was positive, for he knew my ways and had been surprised to find my pipe so untidily pocketed.

I had a light breakfast in the coffee-room, and as I ate it I kept wondering as to what exactly I had been doing the night before. Odd little details were coming back to me; in particular, a recollection of some great effort which had taken all the strength out of me. Could I have been drugged? Not the Thursday Club madeira. Medina's whisky-and-soda? The idea was nonsense; in any case

a drugged man does not have a clean tongue the next morning.

I interviewed the night porter, for I thought he might have something to tell me.

"Did you notice what hour I came home last night?" I asked.

"It was this morning, Sir Richard," the man replied, with the suspicion of a grin. "About half-past three, it would be, or twenty minutes to four."

"God bless my soul!" I exclaimed. "I had no notion it was so late. I sat up talking with a friend."

"You must have been asleep in the car, Sir Richard, for the chauffeur had to wake you, and you were that drowsy I thought I'd better take you upstairs myself. The bedrooms on the top floor is not that easy found."

"I didn't drop a pipe-case?" I asked.

"No, sir." The man's discreet face revealed that he thought I had been dining too well but was not inclined to blame me for it.

By luncheon-time I had decided that I was not going to be ill, for there was no longer anything the matter with my body except a certain stiffness in the joints and the ghost of a headache behind my eyes. But my mind was in a precious confusion. I had stayed in Medina's room till after three, and had not been conscious of anything that happened there after, say, half-past eleven. I had left finally in such a state that I had forgotten my pipe-case, and had arrived at the Club in somebody's car — probably Medina's — so sleepy that I had to be escorted upstairs, and had awoke so ill that I thought I had botulism. What in Heaven's name had happened?

I fancy that the fact that I had resisted the influence brought to bear on me with my *mind*, though tongue and

limbs had been helpless, enabled me to remember **what** the wielder of the influence had meant to be forgotten. At any rate bits of that strange scene began to come back. I remembered the uncanny brightness — remembered it not with fear but with acute indignation. I vaguely recalled that I had repeated nonsense to somebody's dictation, but what it was I could not yet remember. The more I thought of it the angrier I grew. Medina must have been responsible, though to connect him with it seemed ridiculous when I thought of what I had seen of him. Had he been making me the subject of some scientific experiment? If so, it was infernal impertinence. Anyhow it had failed — that was a salve to my pride — for I had kept my head through it. The doctor had been right who had compared me with Table Mountain.

I had got thus far in my reflections, when I recollected that which put a different complexion on the business. Suddenly I remembered the circumstances in which I had made Medina's acquaintance. From him Tom Green-slade had heard the three facts which fitted in with the jingle which was the key to the mystery that I was sworn to unravel. Hitherto I had never thought of this dazzling figure except as an ally. Was it possible that he might be an enemy? The turn-about was too violent for my mind to achieve it in one movement. I swore to myself that Medina was straight, that it was sheer mania to believe that a gentleman and a sportsman could ever come within hailing distance of the hideous under-world which Macgillivray had revealed to me. . . . But Sandy had not quite taken to him. . . . I thanked my stars that anyhow I had said nothing to him about my job. I did not really believe that there was any doubt about him, but I realised that I must walk very carefully.

And then another idea came to me. Hypnotism had been tried on me, and it had failed. But those who tried it must believe from my behaviour that it had succeeded. If so, somehow and somewhere they would act on that belief. It was my business to encourage it. I was **sure** enough of myself to think that, now I was forewarned, no further hypnotic experiments could seriously affect me. But let them show their game, let me pretend to be helpless wax in their hands. Who "they" were I had still to find out.

I had a great desire to get hold of Sandy and talk it over, but though I rung up several of his lairs I could not find him. Then I decided to see Dr. Newhover, for I was certain that that name had come to me out of the medley of last night. So I telephoned and made an appointment with him for that afternoon, and four o'clock saw me starting out to walk to Wimpole Street.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSE IN GOSPEL OAK

It was a dry March afternoon, with one of those fantastic winds which seem to change their direction hourly, and contrive to be in a man's face at every street corner. The dust was swirling in the gutters, and the scent of hyacinth and narcissus from the flower-shops was mingled with that bleak sandy smell which is London's foretaste of spring. As I crossed Oxford Street I remember thinking what an odd pointless business I had drifted into. I saw nothing for it but to continue drifting and see what happened. I was on my way to visit a doctor of whom I knew nothing, about some ailment which I was not conscious of possessing. I didn't even trouble to make a plan, being content to let chance have the guiding of me.

The house was one of those solid dreary erections which have usually the names of half a dozen doctors on their front doors. But in this case there was only one — Dr. M. Newhover. The parlour-maid took me into the usual drab waiting-room furnished with Royal Academy engravings, fumed oak, and an assortment of belated picture-papers, and almost at once she returned and ushered me into the consulting-room. This again was of the most ordinary kind — glazed bookcases, wash-hand basin in a corner, roll-top desk, a table with a medical journal or two and some leather cases. And Dr. Newhover at first sight seemed nothing out of the common. He was a youngish man, with high cheek-bones, a high forehead, and a quantity of blond hair brushed straight back from it. He wore

a *pince-nez*, and when he removed it showed pale prominent blue eyes. From his look I should have said that his father had called himself Neuhofer.

He greeted me with a manner which seemed to me to be at once patronising and dictatorial. I wondered if he was some tremendous swell in his profession, of whom I ought to have heard. "Well, Mr. Hannay, what can I do for you?" he said. I noticed that he called me "Mr." though I had given "Sir Richard" both on the telephone and to the parlour-maid. It occurred to me that some one had already been speaking of me to him, and that he had got the name wrong in his memory.

I thought I had better expound the alarming symptoms with which I had awakened that morning.

"I don't know what's gone wrong with me," I said. "I've a pain behind my eyeballs, and my whole head seems muddled up. I feel drowsy and slack, and I've got a weakness in my legs and back like a man who has just had 'flu.'"

He made me sit down and proceeded to catechise me about my health. I said it had been good enough, but I mentioned my old malaria and several concussions, and I pretended to be pretty nervous about my condition. Then he went through the whole bag of tricks — sounding me with a stethoscope, testing my blood pressure, and hitting me hard below the knee to see if I reacted. I had to play up to my part, but upon my soul I came near reacting too vigorously to some of his questions and boxing his ears. Always he kept up that odd, intimate, domineering, rather offensive manner.

He made me lie down on a couch while he fingered the muscles of my neck and shoulder and seemed to be shampooing my head with his long chilly hands. I was by this

time feeling rather extra well, but I managed to invent little tendernesses here and there and a lot of alarming mental aberrations. I wondered if he were not getting suspicious, for he asked abruptly: "Have you had these symptoms long?" so I thought it better to return to the truth, and told him "only since this morning."

At last he bade me get up, took off the tortoise-shell spectacles he had been wearing and resumed his *pince-nez*, and while I was buttoning my collar seemed to be sunk in reflection. He made me sit in the patient's chair, and stood up and looked down on me with a magisterial air that made me want to laugh.

"You are suffering," he said, "from a somewhat abnormal form of a common enough complaint. Just as the effects of a concussion are often manifest only some days after the blow, so the results of nervous strain may take a long time to develop. I have no doubt that in spite of your good health you have during recent years been working your mind and body at an undue pressure, and now this morning quite suddenly you reap the fruits. I don't want to frighten you, Mr. Hannay, but neurosis is so mysterious a disease in its working that we must take it seriously, especially at its first manifestations. There are one or two points in your case which I am not happy about. There is, for example, a certain congestion — or what seems to me a congestion — in the nerve centres of the neck and head. That may be induced by the accidents — concussion and the like — which you have told me of, or it may not. The true cure must, of course, take time, and rest and change of scene are obligatory. You are fond of sport? A fisherman?"

I told him I was.

"Well, a little later I may prescribe a salmon river in

Norway. The remoteness of the life from ordinary existence and the contemplation of swift running water have had wonderful results with some of my patients. But Norway is not possible till May, and in the mean time I am going to order you specific treatment. Yes. I mean massage, but by no means ordinary massage. That science is still in its infancy, and its practitioners are only fumbling at the doorway. But now and then we find a person, man or woman, with a kind of extra sense for disentangling and smoothing out muscular and nervous abnormalities. I am going to send you to such an one. The address may surprise you, but you are man of the world enough to know that medical skill is not confined to the area between Oxford Street and the Marylebone Road." He took off his glasses, and smiled.

Then he wrote something on a slip of paper and handed it to me. I read "Madame Breda, 4 Palmyra Square, N.W."

"Right!" I said. "Much obliged to you. I hope Madame Breda will cure this infernal headache. When can I see her?"

"I can promise you she will cure the headache. She is a Swedish lady who has lived in London since the War, and is so much an enthusiast in her art that she will only now and then take a private patient. For the most part she gives her skill free to the children's hospitals. But she will not refuse me. As for beginning, I should lose no time for the sake of your own comfort. What about to-morrow morning?"

"Why not to-night? I have nothing to do, and I want to be quit of my headache before bedtime. Why shouldn't I go on there now?"

"No reason in the world. But I must make an appoint-

ment. Madame is on the telephone. Excuse me a moment."

He left the room and returned in a few minutes to say that he had made an appointment for seven o'clock. "It is an outlandish place to get to, but most taxi-drivers know it. If your man doesn't, tell him to drive to Gospel Oak, and then any policeman will direct you."

I had my cheque-book with me, but he didn't want his fee, saying that he was not done with me. I was to come back in a week and report progress. As I left I had a strong impression of a hand as cold as a snake, pale bulging eyes, and cheek-bones like a caricature of a Scotchman. An odd but rather impressive figure was Dr. Newhover. He didn't look a fool, and if I hadn't known the uncommon toughness of my constitution I might have been unsettled by his forebodings.

I walked down Oxford Street and had tea in a tea-shop. As I sat among the chattering typists and shopboys I kept wondering whether I was not wasting my time and behaving like a jackass. Here was I, as fit as a hunter, consulting specialists and visiting unknown masseuses in North London, and all with no clear purpose. In less than twenty-four hours I had tumbled into a perfectly crazy world, and for a second I had a horrid doubt whether the craziness was not inside my mind. Had something given in my brain last night in Medina's room, so that now I was what people call "wanting?" I went over the sequence of events again, and was reassured by remembering that in it all I had kept my head. I had not got to the stage of making theories; I was still only waiting on developments, and I couldn't see any other way before me. I must, of course, get hold of Sandy, but first let me see what this massage business meant. It might

all be perfectly square; I might have remembered Dr. Newhover's name by a queer trick of memory — heard it, perhaps, from some friend — and that remarkable practitioner might be quite honest. But then I remembered the man's manner — I was quite clear that he knew something of me, that some one had told him to expect me. Then it occurred to me that I might be doing a rash thing in going off to an unknown house in a seedy suburb. So I went into a public telephone-booth, rang up the Club, and told the porter that if Colonel Arbuthnot called I was at 4 Palmyra Square, N.W. — I made him write down the address — and would be back before ten o'clock.

I was rather short of exercise, so I decided to walk, since I had plenty of time. Strangely enough, the road was pretty much that which I had taken on that June day of 1914 when I had been waiting on Bullivant and the Black Stone gentry, and had walked clean out of London to pass the time.¹ Then, I remembered, I had been thrilling with wild anticipation, but now I was an older and much wiser man, and though I was sufficiently puzzled I could curb my restlessness with philosophy. I went up Portland Place, past the Regent's Park, till I left the houses of the well-to-do behind me, and got into that belt of mean streets which is the glaxis of the northern heights. Various policemen directed me, and I enjoyed the walk as if I had been exploring, for London is always to me an undiscovered country. I passed yards which not so long ago had been patches of market-garden, and terraces, sometimes pretentious, and now sinking into slums; for London is like the tropical bush — if you don't exercise constant care the jungle, in the shape of the slums,

¹ See *The Thirty-nine Steps*.

will break in. The streets were full of clerks and shop-girls waiting for buses, and workmen from the Saint Pancras and Clerkenwell factories going home. The wind was rising, and in the untidy alleys was stirring up a noisome dust; but as the ground rose it blew cleaner and seemed to bring from Kentish fields and the Channel the tonic freshness of spring. I stopped for a little and watched behind me the plain of lights which was London quivering in the dark-blue windy dusk.

It was almost dark when at last, after several false casts, I came into Palmyra Square. It was a square only in name, for one side was filled with a warehouse of sorts, and another straggled away in nests of small brick houses. One side was a terrace of artisans' dwellings, quite new, each with a tiny bow-window and names like "Chatsworth" and "Kitchener Villa." The fourth side, facing south, had once had a certain dignity, and the builder who had designed the place seventy years ago had thought, no doubt, that he was creating a desirable residential quarter. There the houses stood apart, each in a patch of garden, which may at one time have had lawns and flowers. Now these gardens were mere dusty yards, the refuge of tin cans and bits of paper, and only a blackened elm, an ill-grown privet hedge, and some stunted lilacs told of the more cheerful past. On one house was the brass plate of a doctor, on another that of a teacher of music; several advertised lodgings to let; the steps were untidy, the gates askew on their hinges, and over everything was written the dreary legend of a shabby gentility on the very brink of squalor.

Number 4 was smarter than the others, and its front door had been newly painted a vivid green. I rang the bell, which was an electric one, and the door was opened

by a maid who looked sufficiently respectable. When I entered I saw that the house was on a more generous scale than I had thought, and had once, no doubt, been the home of some comfortable citizen. The hall was not the tank-like thing of the small London dwelling, and the room into which I was ushered, though small, was well furnished and had an electric fire in the grate. It seemed to be a kind of business room, for there was a telephone, a big safe, and on the shelves a line of lettered boxes for papers. I began to think that Madame Breda, whoever she might be, must be running a pretty prosperous show on ordinary business lines.

I was presently led by the maid to a room on the other side of the hall, where I was greeted by a smiling lady. Madame was a plump person in the early forties, with dark hair and a high colour, who spoke English almost without an accent. "Dr. Newhover has sent you. So? He has told me. Will you please go in there and take off your coat and waistcoat? Your collar, too, please."

I did as I was bid, and in a little curtained cubicle divested myself of these garments and returned in my shirt-sleeves. The room was a very pleasant one, with folding doors at one end, furnished like an ordinary drawing-room, with flowers in pots, and books, and what looked like good eighteenth-century prints. Any suspicion I may have had of the *bona fides* of the concern received a rude shock. Madame had slipped over her black dress a white linen overall, such as surgeons wear, and she had as her attendant a small thin odd-looking girl, who also wore an overall, and whose short hair was crowned with a small white cap.

"This is Gerda," Madame said. "Gerda helps me. She is very clever." She smiled on Gerda, and Gerda smiled

back, a limp little contortion of a perfectly expressionless face.

Madame made me lie down on a couch. "You have a headache?"

I mendaciously said that I had.

"That I can soon cure. But there are other troubles? So? These I must explore. But first I will take away the pain."

I felt her light firm fingers playing about my temples and the base of my skull and my neck muscles. A very pleasant sensation it was, and I am certain that if I had been suffering from the worst headache in the world it would have been spirited away. As it was, being in excellent health, I felt soothed and freshened.

"So," she said, beaming down on me. "You are better? You are so beeg that it is not easy to be well all over at once. Now, I must look into more difficult things. You are not happy in your nerves — not altogether. Ah! these nerves! We do not quite know what they are, except that they are what you call the devil. You are very wakeful now. Is it not so? Well, I must put you to sleep. That is necessary, if you are willing."

"Right-o," I answered; but inwardly I said to myself, "No, my woman, I bet you don't." I was curicus to see if, now that I was forewarned, I could resist any hypnotic business, as I believed I could.

I imagined that she would try to master me with her eyes, which were certainly remarkable orbs. But her procedure was the very opposite, for the small girl brought some things on a tray, and I saw that they were bandage First of all, with a fine cambric handkerchief, she swatheo my eyes, and then tied above it another of some heavy opaque material. They were loosely bound, so that I

scarcely felt them, but I was left in the thickest darkness. I noticed that she took special pains so to adjust them that they should not cover my ears.

"You are not wakeful," I heard her voice say, "I think you are sleepy. You will sleep now."

I felt her fingers stray over my face, and the sensation was different, for whereas, when she had treated my headache, they had set up a delicious cool tingling of the skin, now they seemed to induce wave upon wave of an equally pleasant languor. She pressed my forehead, and my senses seemed to be focussed there and to be lulled by that pressure. All the while she was cooing to me in a voice which was like the drowsy swell of the sea. If I had wanted to go to sleep I could have dropped off easily, but, as I didn't want to, I had no difficulty in resisting the gentle coercion. That, I fancy, is my position about hypnotism. I am no kind of use under compulsion, and for the thing to affect me it has to have the backing of my own will. Anyhow, I could appreciate the pleasantness of it and yet disregard it. But it was my business to be a good subject, so I pretended to drift away into slumber. I made my breath come slowly and softly, and let my body relax into impassivity.

Presently she appeared to be satisfied. She said a word to the child, whose feet I could hear cross the room. There was a sound of opening doors — my ears, remember, were free of the bandages and my hearing is acute — and then it seemed to me that the couch on which I lay began slowly to move. I had a moment of alarm and nearly gave away the show by jerking up my head. The couch seemed to travel very smoothly on rails, and I was conscious that I had passed through the folding doors and was now in another room. Then the movement stopped,

and I realised that I was in an entirely different atmosphere. I realised, too, that a new figure had come on the scene.

There was no word spoken, but I had the queer inexplicable consciousness of human presences which is independent of sight and hearing. I have said that the atmosphere of the place had changed. There was a scent in the air which anywhere else I would have sworn was due to peat smoke, and mixed with it another intangible savour which I could not put a name to, but which did not seem to belong to London at all, or to any dwelling, but to some wild out-of-doors. . . . And then I was aware of noiseless fingers pressing my temples.

They were not the plump capable hands of Madame Breda. Nay, they were as fine and tenuous as a wandering wind, but behind their airy lightness was a hint of steel, as if they could choke as well as caress. I lay supine, trying to keep my breathing regular, since I was supposed to be asleep, but I felt an odd excitement rising in my heart. And then it quieted, for the fingers seemed to be smoothing it away. . . . A voice was speaking in a tongue of which I knew not a word, not speaking to me, but repeating, as it were, a private incantation. And the touch and voice combined to bring me nearer to losing my wits than even on the night before, nearer than I have ever been in all my days.

The experience was so novel and overpowering that I find it hard to give even a rough impression of it. Let me put it this way. A man at my time of life sees old age not so very far distant, and the nearer he draws to the end of his journey the more ardently he longs for his receding youth. I do not mean that, if some fairy granted him the gift, he would go back to boyhood; few of us would choose

such a return; but he clothes all his youth in a happy radiance and aches to recapture the freshness and wonder with which he then looked on life. He treasures, like a mooning girl, stray sounds and scents and corners of landscape, which for a moment push the door ajar. . . . As I lay blindfolded on that couch I felt mysterious hands and voices plucking on my behalf at the barrier of the years and breaking it down. I was escaping into a delectable country, the Country of the Young, and I welcomed the escape. Had I been hypnotised, I should beyond doubt have moved like a sheep whithersoever this shepherd willed.

But I was awake, and, though on the very edge of surrender, I managed to struggle above the tides. Perhaps to my waking self the compulsion was too obvious and aroused a faint antagonism. Anyhow I had already begun a conscious resistance when the crooning voice spoke in English.

"You are Richard Hannay," it said. "You have been asleep, but I have wakened you. You are happy in the world in which you have wakened?"

My freedom was now complete, for I had begun to laugh, silently, far down at the bottom of my heart. I remembered last night, and the performance in Medina's house which had all day been growing clearer in my memory. I saw it as farce, and this as farce, and at the coming of humour the spell died. But it was up to me to make some kind of an answer, if I wanted to keep up the hoax, so I did my best to screw out an eerie sleep-walker's voice.

"I am happy," I said, and my pipe sounded like the twittering of sheeted ghosts.

"You wish to wake often in this world?"

I signified by a croak that I did.

"But to wake you must first sleep, and I alone can make you sleep and wake. I exact a price, Richard Hannay. Will you pay my price?"

I was puzzled about the voice. It had not the rich foreign tones of Madame Breda, but it had a very notable accent, which I could not place. At one moment it seemed to have the lilt which you find in Western Ross, but there were cadences in it which were not Highland. Also, its *timbre* was curious — very light and thin like a child's. Was it possible that the queer little girl I had seen was the sibyl? No, I decided; the hands had not been a child's hands.

"I will pay any price," I said, which seemed to be the answer required of me.

"Then you are my servant when I summon you. Now, sleep again."

I had never felt less like being any one's servant. The hands fluttered again around my temples, but they had no more effect on me than the buzzing of flies. I had an insane desire to laugh, which I repressed by thinking of the idiotic pointlessness of my recent doings. . . . I felt my couch slide backwards, and heard the folding doors open again and close. Then I felt my bandages being deftly undone, and I lay with the light on my closed eyelids, trying to look like a sleeping warrior on a tomb. Some one was pressing below my left ear and I recognised the old hunter's method of bringing a man back gently from sleep to consciousness, so I set about the job of making a workmanlike awaking. I hope I succeeded. Anyhow I must have looked dazed enough, for the lamps hurt my eyes after the muffled darkness.

I was back in the first room, with only Madame beside me. She beamed on me with the friendliest eyes, and

helped me on with my coat and collar. "I have had you under close observation," she said, "for sleep often reveals where the ragged ends of the nerves lie. I have made certain deductions, which I will report to Doctor Newhover. . . . No, there is no fee. Doctor Newhover will make arrangements." She bade me good-bye in the best professional manner, and I descended the steps into Palmyra Square as if I had been spending a commonplace hour having my back massaged for lumbago.

Once in the open air I felt abominably tired and very hungry. By good luck I hadn't gone far when I picked up a taxi and told it to drive to the Club. I looked at my watch and saw that it was later than I thought — close on ten o'clock. I had been several hours in the house, and small wonder I was weary.

I found Sandy wandering restlessly about the hall. "Thank God," he said when he saw me. "Where the devil have you been, Dick? The porter gave me a crazy address in North London. You look as if you wanted a drink."

"I feel as if I wanted food," I said. "I have a lot to tell you, but I must eat first. I've had no dinner."

Sandy sat opposite me while I fed, and forebore to ask questions.

"What put you in such a bad humour last night?" I asked.

He looked very solemn. "Lord knows. No, that's not true. I know well enough. I didn't take to Medina."

"Now I wonder why?"

"I wonder too. But I'm just like a dog: I take a dislike to certain people at first sight, and the queer thing is that my instinct isn't often wrong."

"Well, you're pretty well alone in your opinion. What

sets you against him? He is well-mannered, modest, a good sportsman, and you can see he's as clever as they make."

"Maybe. But I've got a notion that the man is one vast lie. However, let's put it that I reserve my opinion. I have various inquiries to make."

We found the little back smoking-room on the first floor empty, and when I had lit my pipe and got well into an armchair, Sandy drew up another at my elbow. "Now, Dick," he said.

"First," I said, "it may interest you to learn that Medina dabbles in hypnotism."

"I knew that," he said, "from his talk last night."

"How on earth --?"

"Oh, from a casual quotation he used. It's a longish story, which I'll tell you later. Go on."

I began from the break-up of the Thursday Club dinner and told him all I could remember of my hours in Medina's house. As a story it met with an immense success. Sandy was so interested that he couldn't sit in his chair, but must get up and stand on the hearth-rug before me. I told him that I had wakened up feeling uncommonly ill, with a blank mind except for the address of a doctor-man in Wimpole Street, and how during the day recollection had gradually come back to me. He questioned me like a cross-examining counsel.

"Bright light — ordinary hypnotic property. Face, which seemed detached — that's a common enough thing in Indian magic. You say you must have been asleep, but were also in a sense awake and could hear and answer questions, and that you felt a kind of antagonism all the time which kept your will alive. You're probably about the toughest hypnotic proposition in the world, Dick,

and you can thank God for that. Now, what were the questions? A summons to forget your past and begin as a new creature, subject to the authority of a master. You assented, making private reservations of which the hypnotist knew nothing. If you had not kept your head and made those reservations, you would have remembered nothing at all of last night, but there would have been a subconscious bond over your will. As it is, you're perfectly free; only the man who tried to monkey with you doesn't know that. Therefore you begin by being one up on the game. You know where you are and he doesn't know where he is."

"What do you suppose Medina meant by it? It was infernal impertinence anyhow. But was it Medina? I seem to remember another man in the room before I left."

"Describe him."

"I've only a vague picture — a sad grey-faced fellow."

"Well, assume for the present that the experimenter was Medina. There's such a thing, remember, as spiriting away a man's recollection of his past, and starting him out as a waif in a new world. I've heard in the East of such performances, and of course it means that the memory-less being is at the mercy of the man who has stolen his memory. That is probably not the intention in your case. They wanted only to establish a subconscious control. But it couldn't be done at once with a fellow of your antecedents, so they organised a process. They suggested to you in your trance a doctor's name, and the next stage was his business. You woke feeling very seedy and remembering a doctor's address, and they argued that you would think that you had been advised about the fellow and make a bee-line for him. Remember, they would assume that you had no recollection of anything else from

the night's doings. Now go ahead and tell me about the surgeon. Did you go to see him?"

I continued my story, and at the Wimpole Street episode Sandy laughed long and loud.

"Another point up in the game. You say you think the leech had been advised of your coming and not by you? By the way, he seems to have talked fairly good sense, but I'd as soon vet a hippopotamus for nerves as you." He wrote down Dr. Newhover's address in his pocket book. "*Continuez*. You then proceeded, I take it, to 4 Palmyra Square."

At the next stage in my narrative he did not laugh. I dare say I told it better than I have written it down here, for I was fresh from the experience, and I could see that he was a good deal impressed.

"A Swedish masseuse and an odd-looking little girl. She puts you to sleep, or thinks she has, and then, when your eyes are bandaged, some one else nearly charms the soul out of you. That sounds big magic. I see the general lines of it, but it is big magic, and I didn't know that it was practised on these shores. Dick, this is getting horribly interesting. You kept wide awake — you are an old buffalo, you know — but you gave the impression of absolute surrender. Good for you — you are now three points ahead in the game."

"Well, but what is the game? I'm hopelessly puzzled."

"So am I, but we must work on assumptions. Let us suppose Medina is responsible. He may be only trying to find out the extent of his powers, and selects you as the most difficult subject to be found. You may be sure he knows all about your record. He may be only a vain man experimenting."

"In which case," I said, "I propose to punch his head."

"In which case, as you justly observe, you will give yourself the pleasure of punching his head. But suppose that he has got a far deeper purpose, something really dark and damnable. If by his hypnotic power he could make a tool of you, consider what an asset he would have found. A man of your ability and force. I have always said, you remember, that you had a fine natural talent for crime."

"I tell you, Sandy, that's nonsense. It's impossible that there's anything wrong — badly wrong — with Medina."

"Improbable, but not impossible. We're taking no chances. And if he were a scoundrel, think what a power he might be with all his talents and charm and popularity."

Sandy flung himself into a chair and appeared to be meditating. Once or twice he broke silence.

"I wonder what Dr. Newhover meant by talking of a salmon river in Norway. Why not golf at North Berwick?"

And again:

"You say there was a scent like peat in the room? Peat! You are certain?"

Finally he got up. "To-morrow," he said, "I think I will have a look round the house in Gospel Oak. Gospel Oak, by the way, is a funny name, isn't it? You say it has electric light. I will visit it as a man from the corporation to see about the meter. Oh, that can easily be managed. Macgillivray will pass the word for me."

The mention of Macgillivray brought me to attention. "Look here," I said, "I'm simply wasting my time. I got in touch with Medina in order to ask his help, and now I've been landed in a set of preposterous experiences which

have nothing to do with my job. I must see Macgillivray to-morrow about getting alongside his Shropshire squire. For the present there can be nothing doing with Medina."

"Shropshire squire be hanged! You're an old ass, Dick. For the present there's everything doing with Medina. You wanted his help. Why? Because he was the next stage in the clue to that nonsensical rhyme. Well, you've discovered that there may be odd things about him. You can't get his help, but you may get something more. You may get the secret itself. Instead of having to burrow into his memory, as you did with Greenslade, you may find it sticking out of his life."

"Do you really believe that?" I asked in some bewilderment.

"I believe nothing as yet. But it is far the most promising line. He thinks that from what happened last night plus what happened two hours ago you are under his influence, an acolyte, possibly a tool. It may be all quite straight, or it may be most damnably crooked. You have got to find out. You must keep close to him, and foster his illusions, and play up to him for all you're worth. He is bound to show his hand. You needn't take any steps on your own account. He'll give you the lead all right."

I can't say I liked the prospect, for I have no love for play-acting, but I am bound to admit that Sandy talked sense. I asked him about himself, for I counted on his backing more than I could say.

"I propose to resume my travels," he said. "I wish to pursue my studies in the Bibliothèque Nationale of France."

"But I thought you were with me in this show."

"So I am. I go abroad on your business, as I shall explain to you some day. Also I want to see the man whom

we used to call Ram Dass. I believe him to be in Munich at this moment. The day after to-morrow you will read in the 'Times' that Colonel the Master of Clanroyden has gone abroad for an indefinite time on private business."

"How long will you be away?" I groaned.

"A week perhaps, or a fortnight — or more. And when I come back it may not be as Sandy Arbuthnot."

CHAPTER VII

SOME EXPERIENCES OF A DISCIPLE

I DIDN'T see Sandy again, for he took the night train for Paris next evening, and I had to go down to Oxford that day to appear as a witness in a running-down case. But I found a note for me at the Club when I got back the following morning. It contained nothing except these words: "*Coverts drawn blank, no third person in house.*" I had not really hoped for anything from Sandy's expedition to Palmyra Square, and thought no more about it.

He didn't return in a week, nor yet in a fortnight, and, realising that I had only a little more than two months to do my job in, I grew very impatient. But my time was pretty well filled with Medina, as you shall hear.

While I was reading Sandy's note Turpin turned up, and begged me to come for a drive in his new Delage and talk to him. The Marquis de la Tour du Pin was, if possible, more pallid than before, his eyelids heavier, and his gentleness more silken. He drove me miles into the country, away through Windsor Forest, and as we raced at sixty miles an hour he uncovered his soul. He was going mad, it seemed; was, indeed, already mad, and only a slender and doubtless ill-founded confidence in me prevented him shooting himself. He was convinced that Adela Victor was dead, and that no trace of her would ever be found. "These policemen of yours — bah!" he moaned. "Only in England can people vanish." He concluded, however, that he would stay alive till he had avenged her, for he believed that a good God would some day deliver

her murderer into his hands. I was desperately sorry for him, for behind his light gasconading manner there were marks of acute suffering, and indeed in his case I think I should have gone crazy. He asked me for hope, and I gave him it, and told him what I did not believe — that I saw light in the business, and had every confidence that we would restore him his sweetheart safe and sound. At that he cheered up and wanted to embrace me, thereby jolly nearly sending the Delage into a ditch and us both into eternity. He was burning for something to do, and wanted me to promise that as soon as possible I would inspan him into my team. That made me feel guilty, for I knew I had no team, and nothing you could call a clue; so I talked hastily about Miss Victor, lest he should ask me more.

I had her portrait drawn for me in lyric prose. She was slight, it seemed, middling tall, could ride like Diana and dance like the nymphs. Her colouring and hair were those of a brunette, but her eyes were a deep grey, and she had the soft voice which commonly goes with such eyes. Turpin, of course, put all this more poetically, relapsing frequently into French. He told me all kinds of things about her — how she was crazy about dogs, and didn't fear anything in the world, and walked with a throw-out, and lisped delightfully when she was excited. Altogether at the end of it I felt I had a pretty good notion of Miss Victor, especially as I had studied about fifty photographs of her in Macgillivray's room.

As we were nearing home again it occurred to me to ask him if he knew Medina. He said no, but that he was dining at the Victors' that evening — a small dinner party, mostly political. "He is wonderful, that Mr. Victor. He will not change his life, and his friends think

Adela is in New York for a farewell visit. He is like the Spartan boy with the fox."

"Tell Mr. Victor, with my compliments," I said, "that I would like to dine there to-night. I have a standing invitation. Eight-fifteen, isn't it?"

It turned out to be a very small and select party — the Foreign Secretary, Medina, Palliser-Yeates, the Duke of Alcester, Lord Sunningdale, the ex-Lord Chancellor, Levasseur the French Minister, besides Turpin and myself. There were no women present. The behaviour of the Duke and Mr. Victor was a lesson in fortitude, and you would never have guessed that these two men were living with a nightmare. It was not a talkative assembly, though Sunningdale had a good deal to say to the table about a new book that a German had written on the mathematical conception of infinity, a subject which even his brilliant exposition could not make clear to my thick wits. The Foreign Secretary and Levasseur had a *tête-à-tête*, with Turpin as a hanger-on, and the rest of us would have been as dull as sticks if it had not been for Medina. I had a good chance of observing his quality, and I must say I was astonished at his skill. It was he who by the right kind of question turned Sunningdale's discourse on infinity, which would otherwise have been a pedantic monologue, into good conversation. We got on to politics afterwards, and Medina, who had just come from the House was asked what was happening.

"They had just finished the usual *plat du jour*, the suspension of a couple of Labour mountebanks," he said.

This roused Sunningdale, who rather affected the Labour party, and I was amused to see how Medina handled the ex-Chancellor. He held him in good-humoured argument, never forsaking his own position, but shedding

about the whole subject an atmosphere of witty and tolerant understanding. I felt that he knew more about the business than Sunningdale, that he knew so much he could afford to give his adversary rope. Moreover, he never forgot that he was at a dinner-table, the pitch and key of his talk were exactly right, and he managed to bring every one into it.

To me he was extraordinarily kind. Indeed he treated me like a very ancient friend, bantering and affectionate and yet respectful, and he forced me to take a full share in the conversation. Under his stimulus, I became quite intelligent, and amazed Turpin, who had never credited me with any talents except for fighting. But I had not forgotten what I was there for, and if I had been inclined to, there were the figures of Victor and the Duke to remind me. I watched the two, the one thin, grey-bearded, rather like an admiral with his vigilant dark eyes, the other heavy-jowled, rubicund, crowned with fine silver hair; in both I saw shadows of pain stealing back to the corners of lip and eye, whenever the face was in repose. And Medina — the very *beau idéal* of a courteous, kindly, open-air Englishman. I noted how in his clothes he avoided any touch of overdressing, no fancifully-cut waistcoat or too-smartly-tied tie. In manner and presence he was the perfection of un-self-conscious good-breeding. It was my business to play up to him, and I let my devotion be pretty evident. The old Duke, whom I now met for the first time, patted my shoulder as we left the dining-room. "I am glad to see that you and Medina are friends, Sir Richard. Thank God that we have a man like him among the young entry. They ought to give him office at once, you know, get him inside the shafts of the coach. Otherwise he'll find something more interesting to do than politics."

By tacit consent we left the house together, and I walked the streets by his side, as I had done three nights before. What a change, I reflected, in my point of view! Then I had been blind, now I was acutely watchful. He slipped an arm into mine as we entered Pall Mall, but its pressure did not seem so much friendly as possessive.

"You are staying at your Club?" he said. "Why not take up your quarters with me while you are in town? There's ample room in Hill Street."

The suggestion put me into a fright. To stay with him at present would wreck all my schemes; but, supposing he insisted, could I refuse, if it was my rôle to appear to be under his domination? Happily he did not insist. I made a lot of excuses — plans unsettled, constantly running down to the country, and so on.

"All right. But some day I may make the offer again, and then I'll take no refusal."

They were just the kind of words a friend might have used, but somehow, though the tone was all right, they slightly grated on me.

"How are you?" he asked. "Most people who have led your life find the English spring trying. You don't look quite as fit as when I first saw you."

"No. I've been rather seedy this past week — head-achy, loss of memory, stuffed-up brain and that sort of thing. I expect it's the spring fret. I've seen a doctor and he doesn't worry about it."

"Who's your man?"

"A chap Newhover in Wimpole Street."

He nodded. "I've heard of him. They tell me he's good."

"He has ordered me massage," I said boldly. "That cures the headaches anyway."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Then he suddenly released my arm.

"I see Arbuthnot has gone abroad."

There was a coldness in his voice to which I hastened to respond.

"So I saw in the papers," I said carelessly. "He's a hopeless fellow. A pity, for he's able enough; but he won't stay put, and that makes him pretty well useless."

"Do you care much for Arbuthnot?"

"I used to," I replied shamelessly. "But till the other day I hadn't seen him for years, and I must say he has grown very queer. Didn't you think he behaved oddly at the Thursday dinner?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I wasn't much taken by him. He's too infernally un-English. I don't know how he got it, but there seems to be a touch of the shrill Levantine in him. Compare him with those fellows to-night. Even the Frenchmen—even Victor, though he's an American and a Jew—are more our own way of thinking."

We were at the Club door, and as I stopped he looked me full in the face.

"If I were you I wouldn't have much to do with Arbuthnot," he said, and his tone was a command. I grinned sheepishly, but my fingers itched for his ears.

I went to bed fuming. This new possessory attitude, this hint of nigger-driving, had suddenly made me hate Medina. I had been unable to set down the hypnotist business clearly to his account, and, even if I had been certain, I was inclined to think it only the impertinent liberty of a faddist—a thing which I hotly resented but which did not arouse my serious dislike. But now—to feel that he claimed me as his man, because he thought, no

doubt, that he had established some unholy power over me — that fairly broke my temper. And his abuse of Sandy put the lid on it — abuse to which I had been shamefully compelled to assent. Levantine, by gad! I swore that Sandy and I would make him swallow that word before he was very much older. I couldn't sleep for thinking about it. By this time I was perfectly willing to believe that Medina was up to any infamy, and I was resolved that in him and him alone lay the key to the riddle of the three hostages. But all the time I was miserably conscious that if I suggested such an idea to any one except Sandy I should be set down as a lunatic. I could see that the man's repute was as solidly planted as the British constitution.

Next morning I went to see Macgillivray. I explained that I had not been idle, that I had been pursuing lines of my own, which I thought more hopeful than his suggestion of getting alongside the Shropshire squire. I said I had nothing as yet to report, and that I didn't propose to give him the faintest notion of what I was after till I had secured some results. But I wanted his help, and I wanted his very best men.

"Glad to see you've got busy, Dick," he said. "I await your commands."

"I want a house watched. Number 4 Palmyra Square, up in North London. So far as I know it is occupied by a woman, who purports to be a Swedish masseuse and calls herself Madame Breda, one or more maids, and an odd-looking little girl. I want you to have a close record kept of the people who go there, and I want especially to know who exactly are the inmates of the house and who are the frequent visitors. It must be done very cautiously, for the people must have no suspicion that they are being spied on."

He wrote down the details.

"Also I want you to find out the antecedents of Medina's butler."

He whistled. "Medina. Dominick Medina, you mean?"

"Yes. Oh, I'm not suspecting *him*." We both laughed, as if at a good joke. "But I should like to hear something about his butler, for reasons which I'm not yet prepared to give you. He answers to the name of Odell, and has the appearance of an inferior prize-fighter. Find out all you can about his past, and it mightn't be a bad plan to have him shadowed. You know Medina's house in Hill Street. But for Heaven's sake, let it be done tactfully."

"I'll see to that for my own sake. I don't want headlines in the evening papers — 'House of Member of Parliament Watched. Another Police Muddle.'"

"Also, could you put together all you can get about Medina? It might give me a line on Odell."

"Dick," he said solemnly, "are you growing fantastic?"

"Not a bit of it. You don't imagine I'm ass enough to think there's anything shady about Medina. He and I have become bosom friends and I like him enormously. Everybody swears by him, and so do I. But I have my doubts about Mr. Odell, and I would like to know just how and where Medina picked him up. He's not the ordinary stamp of butler." It seemed to me very important to let no one but Sandy into the Medina business at present, for our chance lay in his complete confidence that all men thought well of him.

"Right," said Macgillivray. "It shall be done. Go your own way, Dick. I won't attempt to dictate to you. But remember that the thing is desperately serious, and that the days are slipping past. We're in April now. and

you have only till midsummer to save three innocent lives."

I left his office feeling very solemn, for I had suddenly a consciousness of the shortness of time and the magnitude of the job which I had not yet properly begun. I cudgelled my brains to think of my next step. In a few days I should again visit Dr. Newhover, but there was not likely to be much assistance there. He might send me back to Palmyra Square, or I might try to make an appointment with Madame Breda myself, inventing some new ailment; but I would only find the same old business, which would get me no further forward. As I viewed it, the Newhover and Palmyra Square episodes had been used only to test my submission to Medina's influence, and it was to Medina that I must look for further light. It was a maddening job to sit and wait and tick off the precious days on the calendar, and I longed to consult with Sandy. I took to going down to Fosse for the day, for the sight of Mary and Peter John somehow quieted my mind and fixed my resolution. It was a positive relief when at the end of the week Medina rang me up and asked me to luncheon.

We lunched at his house, which, seen on a bright April day, was a wonderful treasury of beautiful things. It was not the kind of house I fancied myself, being too full of museum pieces, and all the furniture strictly correct according to period. I like rooms in which there is a pleasant jumble of things, and which look as if homely people had lived in them for generations. The dining-room was panelled in white, with a Vandyck above the mantelpiece and a set of gorgeous eighteenth-century prints on the walls. At the excellent meal Medina as usual drank water, while I obediently sampled an old hock, an older

port, and a most prehistoric brandy. Odell was in attendance, and I had a good look at him — his oddly shaped head, his flat sallow face, the bunches of black eyebrow above his beady eyes. I calculated that if I saw him again I would not fail to recognise him. We never went near the library on the upper floor, but sat after luncheon in a little smoking-room at the back of the hall, which held my host's rods and guns in glass cabinets, and one or two fine heads of deer and ibex.

I had made up my mind, as I walked to Hill Street, that I was going to convince Medina once and for all of the abjectness of my surrender. He should have proof that I was clay in his hands, for only that way would he fully reveal himself. I detested the job, and as I walked through the pleasant crisp noontide I reflected with bitterness that I might have been fishing for salmon in Scotland, or, better still, cantering with Mary over the Cotswold downs.

All through luncheon I kept my eyes fixed on him like a dog's on his master. Several times I wondered if I were not overdoing it, but he seemed to accept my homage as quite natural. I had thought when I first met him that the man had no vanity; now I saw that he had mountains of it, that he was all vanity, and that his public modesty was only a cloak to set off his immense private conceit. He unbent himself, his whole mind was in undress, and behind the veneer of good-fellowship I seemed to see a very cold arrogant soul. Nothing worse, though that was bad enough. He was too proud to boast in words, but his whole attitude was one long brag. He was cynical about everything, except, as I suspected, his private self-worship. The thing would have been monstrously indecent, if it had not been done with such consummate skill. In-

deed I found my part easy to play, for I was deeply impressed and had no difficulty in showing it.

The odd thing was that he talked a good deal about myself. He seemed to take pains to rout out the codes and standards, the points of honour and points of conduct, which somebody like me was likely to revere, and to break them down with his cynicism. I felt that I was looking on at an attempt, which the devil is believed to specialise in, to make evil good and good evil. . . . Of course I assented gladly. Never had master a more ready disciple. . . . He broke down, too, my modest ambitions. A country life, a wife and family — he showed that they were too trivial for more than a passing thought. He flattered me grossly, and I drank it all in with a silly face. I was fit for bigger things, to which he would show me the way. He sketched some of the things — very flattering they were and quite respectable, but somehow they seemed out of the picture when compared to his previous talk. He was clearly initiating me step by step into something for which I was not yet fully ready. . . . I wished Sandy could have seen me sitting in Medina's armchair, smoking one of his cigars, and agreeing to everything he said like a schoolgirl who wants to keep on the good side of her schoolmistress. And yet I didn't find it difficult, for the man's talk was masterly and in its way convincing, and, while my mind repudiated it, it was easy for my tongue to assent. He was in a prodigious good-humour, and he was kindly, as a keeper is kind to a well-broken dog.

On the doorstep I stammered my thanks. "I wish I could tell you what knowing you means to me. It's—it's far the biggest thing in my life. What I mean to say is—" the familiar patois of the tongue-tied British soldier.

He looked at me with those amazing eyes of his, no kindness in them, only patronage and proprietorship. I think he was satisfied that he had got some one who would serve him body and soul.

I, too, was satisfied, and walked away feeling more cheerful than I had done for days. Surely things would begin to move now, I thought. At the Club, too, I got encouragement in the shape of a letter from Sandy. It bore a French postmark which I could not decipher, and it was the merest scribble, but it greatly heartened me.

I have made progress [it ran], but I have still a lot to do and we can't talk to each other yet awhile. But I shall have to send you letters occasionally, which you must burn on receipt. I shall sign them with some letter of the Greek alphabet — no, you wouldn't recognise that — with the names of recent Derby winners. Keep our affair secret as the grave — don't let in a soul, not even Mac. And for God's sake stick close to M. and serve him like a slave.

There wasn't much in it, but it was hopeful, though the old ruffian didn't seem in a hurry to come home. I wondered what on earth he had found out — something solid, I judged, for he didn't talk lightly of making progress.

That evening I had nothing to do, and after dinner I felt too restless to sit down to a pipe and book. There was no one in the Club I wanted to talk to, so I sallied forth to another pot-house to which I belonged, where there was a chance of finding some of the younger and cheerier generation. Sure enough the first man I saw there was Archie Roylance, who greeted me with a whoop and announced that he was in town for a couple of days to see his doctor. He had had a bad fall steeplechasing earlier in the year, when he had all but broken his neck, but he

declared that he was perfectly fit again except for some stiffness in his shoulder muscles. He was as lame as a duck from his flying smash just before the Armistice, but all the same he got about at a surprising pace. Indeed, out of cussedness he walked more than he used to do in the old days, and had taken to deer-stalking with enthusiasm. I think I have mentioned that he was my partner in the tenancy of Machray forest.

I proposed that we should go to a music-hall or cut into the second act of some play, but Archie had another idea. One of his fads was to be an amateur of dancing, though he had never been a great performer before his smash and would never dance again. He said he wanted to see the latest fashions, and suggested that we should go for an hour to a small (and he added, select) club somewhere in Marylebone, of which he believed he was a member. It bore an evil reputation, he said, for there was a good deal of high play, and the licensing laws were not regarded, but it was a place to see the best dancing. I made no objection, so we strolled up Regent Street in that season of comparative peace when busy people have gone home and the idle are still shut up in theatres and restaurants.

It was a divine April night, and I observed that I wished I were in a better place to enjoy spring weather. "I've just come from a Scotch moor," said Archie. "Lord! the curlews are makin' a joyful noise. That is the bird for my money. Come back with me, Dick, on Friday and I'll teach you a lot of things. You're a wise man, but you might be a better naturalist."

I thought how much I would have given to be able to accept, as the light wind blew down Langham Place. Then I wished that this job would take me out of town into fresh air, where I could get some exercise. The result

was that I was in a baddish temper when we reached our destination, which was in one of the streets near Fitzroy Square. The place proved to be about as hard to get into as the Vatican. It took a long harangue and a tip from Archie to persuade the door-keeper that we were of the right brand of disreputability to be admitted. Finally we found ourselves in a room with sham Chinese decorations, very garishly lit, with about twenty couples dancing, and about twenty more sitting drinking at little tables.

We paid five shillings apiece for a liqueur, found a table and took notice of the show. It seemed to me a wholly rotten and funereal business. A nigger band, looking like monkeys in uniform, pounded out some kind of barbarous jingle, and sad-faced marionettes moved to it. There was no gaiety or devil in that dancing, only a kind of bored perfection. Thin young men with rabbit heads and hair brushed straight back from their brows, who I suppose were professional dancing partners, held close to their breasts women of every shape and age, but all alike in having dead eyes and masks for faces, and the *macabre* procession moved like automata to the niggers' rhythm. I dare say it was all very wonderful, but I was not built by Providence to appreciate it.

"I can't stand much more of this," I told Archie.

"It's no great shakes. But there are one or two high-class performers. Look at that girl dancing with the young Jew — the one in green."

I looked and saw a slim girl, very young apparently, who might have been pretty but for the way her face was loaded with paint and the preposterous style in which her hair was dressed. Little though I know of dancing, I could see that she was a mistress of the art, for every

motion was a delight to watch, and she made poetry out of that hideous ragtime. But her face shocked me. It was *blind*, if you understand me, as expressionless as a mummy, a kind of awful death-in-life. I wondered what kind of experience that poor soul had gone through to give her the stare of a sleep-walker.

As my eyes passed from her they fell on another figure that seemed familiar. I saw that it was Odell the butler, splendidly got up for his night out in dress clothes, white waistcoat and diamond studs. There was no mistaking the pugilistic air of the fellow, now I saw him out of service; I had seen a dozen such behind the bars of sporting public-houses. He could not see me, but I had a fair view of him, and I observed that he also was watching the girl in green.

"Do you know who she is?" I asked.

"Some professional. Gad, she can dance, but the poor child looks as if she found it a hard life. I'd rather like to talk to her."

But the music had stopped, and I could see that Odell had made a sign to the dancer. She came up to him as obediently as a dog; he said something to another man with him, a man with a black beard, and the three passed out at the further door. A moment later I caught a glimpse of her with a cloak round her shoulders passing the door by which we had entered.

Archie laughed. "That big brute is probably her husband. I bet she earns the living of both by dancing at these places, and gets beaten every night. I would say my prayers before taking on that fellow in a scrap."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLIND SPINNER

I LOOK back upon those days of waiting as among the beastliest of my life. I had the clearest conviction now that Medina was the key of the whole puzzle, but as yet I had found out nothing worth mentioning, and I had to wait like the sick folk by the pool of Bethesda till something troubled the waters. The only thing that comforted me was the fine old-fashioned dislike to the man which now possessed me. I couldn't pretend to understand more than a fragment of him, but what I understood I detested. I had been annexed by him as a slave, and every drop of free blood in my veins was in revolt; but I was also resolved to be the most docile slave that ever kissed the ground before a tyrant. Some day my revenge would come and I promised myself that it would be complete. Meantime I thanked Heaven that he had that blind spot of vanity, which would prevent him seeing the cracks in my camouflage.

For the better part of a week we were very little separate. I lunched with him two days out of three, and we motored more than once down to Brighton for fresh air. He took me to a dinner he gave at the House of Commons to a Canadian statesman who was over on a visit, and he made me accompany him to a very smart dance at Lady Amysfort's, and he got me invited to a week-end party at Wirlesdon because he was going there. I went through the whole programme dutifully and not unpleasurably. I must say he treated me admirably in the presence of

other people — with a jolly affectionate friendliness, constantly asking for my opinion, and deferring to me and making me talk, so that the few people I met whom I had known before wondered what had come over me. Mary had a letter from a cousin of hers, who reported that I seemed to have got into society and to be making a big success of it — a letter she forwarded to me with a pencilled note of congratulation at the end. On these occasions I didn't find my task difficult, for I fell unconsciously under the man's spell and could easily play up to him. . . . But when we were alone his manner changed. Iron crept into his voice, and, though he was pleasant enough, he took a devil of a lot for granted, and the note of authority grew more habitual. After such occasions I used to go home grinding my teeth. I never had a worse job than to submit voluntarily to that insolent protection.

Repeatedly in my bedroom at the Club I tried to put together the meagre handful of ascertained facts, but they were like a lot of remnants of different jig-saw puzzles and nothing fitted into anything else. Macgillivray reported that so far he had drawn a blank in the case of Odell; and that the watchers at Palmyra Square had noted very few visitors except tradesmen and organ-grinders. Nothing resembling a gentleman had been seen to enter or leave, so it appeared that my estimate of Madame Breda's flourishing business was wrong. A woman frequently went out and returned, never walking but always in a taxi or a motor-car — probably the same woman, but so hooded and wrapped up as to make details difficult to be clear about. There were a host of little notes — coal or firewood had been delivered one day, twice the wrapped-up lady had gone out in the evening,

to come back in a couple of hours, but mostly she made her visits abroad in daylight, the household woke late and retired to bed early, once or twice a sound like weeping had been heard but it might have been the cat. Altogether it was a poor report, and I concluded that I was either barking up the wrong tree, or that Macgillivray's agents were a pretty useless crowd.

For the rest, what had I? A clear and well-founded suspicion of Medina. But of what? Only that he was behaving towards me in a way that I resented, that he dabbled in an ugly brand of hypnotism, and that the more I saw of him the less I liked him. I knew that his public repute was false, but I had no worse crime to accuse him of than vanity. He had a butler who had been a prize-fighter, and who had a taste for night clubs. I remember I wrote all this down, and sat staring blankly at it, feeling how trivial it was. Then I wrote down the six-line jingle and stared at that too, and I thought of the girl, and the young man, and the small boy who liked birds and fishing. I hadn't a scrap of evidence to link up Medina with that business, except that Tom Greenslade believed that he had got from him the three facts which ran more or less in the rhyme; but Tom might be mistaken, or Medina might have learned them in some perfectly innocent way. I hadn't enough evidence to swing a cat on. But yet — the more I thought of Medina the more dark and subtle his figure loomed in my mind. I had a conviction, on which I would have staked my life, that if I stuck to him I would worry out some vital and damning truth; so, with no very lively or cheerful hope, but with complete certainty, I resolved for the hundredth time to let logic go and back my fancy.

As in duty bound I paid another visit to Dr. Newhover.

He received me casually, and appeared to have forgotten about my case till he looked up his diary.

"Ah, yes, you saw Madame Breda," he said. "I have her report. Your headaches are cured but you are still a little shaky? Yes, please. Take off your coat and waistcoat."

He vetted me very thoroughly, and then sat down in his desk-chair and tapped his eye-glasses on his knee.

"You are better, much better, but you are not cured. That will take time and care, and lies, of course, in your own hands. You are leading a quiet life? Half town, half country — it is probably the best plan. Well, I don't think you can improve on that."

"You said something about fishing in Norway when I was here last."

"No, on the whole I don't recommend it. Your case is slightly different from what I at first supposed."

"You are a fisherman yourself?" I said.

He admitted that he was, and for a minute or two spoke more like a human being. He always used a two-piece Castle-Connell rod, though he granted it was a cumbrous thing to travel with. For flies he swore by Harlows — certainly the best people for Norwegian flies. He thought that there was a greater difference between Norwegian rivers than most people imagined, and Harlows understood that.

He concluded by giving me some simple instructions about diet and exercise.

"If my headaches return, shall I go back to Madame Breda?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Your headaches won't return."

I paid him his fee, and, as I was leaving, I asked if he wanted to see me again.

"I don't think it necessary. At any rate not till the autumn. I may have to be out of London myself a good deal this summer. Of course if you should find the *malaise* recurring, which I do not anticipate, you must come and see me. If I am out of town, you can see my colleague." He scribbled a name and address on a sheet of paper.

I left the house feeling considerably puzzled. Dr. Newhover, who on my first visit had made a great to-do about my health, seemed now to want to be quit of me. His manner was exactly that of a busy doctor dealing with a *malade imaginaire*. The odd thing was that I was really beginning to feel rather seedy, a punishment for my former pretence. It may have been the reaction of my mental worry, but I had the sort of indefinite out-of-sorts feeling which I believe precedes an attack of influenza. Only I had hitherto been immune from influenza.

That night I had another of Sandy's communications, a typed half-sheet with a Paris postmark.

Keep close to M. [it ran]. Do everything he wants. Make it clear that you have broken forever with me. This is desperately important.

It was signed "Buchan," a horse which Sandy seemed to think had been a Derby winner. He knew no more about racing than I knew of Chinese.

Next morning I woke with a bad taste in my mouth and a feeling that I had probably a bout of malaria due me. Now I had had no malaria since the autumn of '17, and I didn't like the prospect of the revisitation. However, as the day wore on, I felt better, and by midday I concluded I was not going to be ill. But all the same I was as jumpy as a cat in a thunderstorm. I had the odd sense of anticipation, which I used to have before a battle,

a lurking excitement by no means pleasant,—not exactly apprehension, but first cousin to it. It made me want to see Medina, as if there was something between him and me that I ought to get over.

All afternoon this dentist-anteroom atmosphere hung about me, and I was almost relieved when about five o'clock I got a telephone message from Hill Street asking me to come there at six. I went round to the Bath Club and had a swim and a shampoo, and then started for the house. On the way there I had those tremors in my legs and coldness in the pit of the stomach which brought back my childish toothaches. Yes, that was it. I felt exactly like a small boy setting off with dreadful anticipations to have a tooth drawn, and not all my self-contempt could cure me of my funk. The house when I reached it seemed larger and lonelier than ever, and the April evening had darkened down to a scurry of chill dusty winds under a sky full of cloud.

Odell opened the door to me, and took me to the back of the hall, where I found a lift which I had not known existed. We went up to the top of the house, and I realised that I was about to enter again the library where before I had so strangely spent the midnight hours.

The curtains were drawn, shutting out the bleak spring twilight, and the room was warmed by, and had for its only light, a great fire of logs. I smelt more than wood smoke; there was peat burning among the oak billets. The scent recalled, not the hundred times when I had sniffed peat-reek in happy places, but the flavour of the room in Palmyra Square when I had lain with bandaged eyes and felt light fingers touch my face. I had suddenly a sense that I had taken a long stride forward, that something fateful was about to happen, and my nervousness dropped from me like a cloak.

Medina was standing before the hearth, but his was not the figure that took my eyes. There was another person in the room, a woman. She sat in the high-backed chair which he had used on the former night, and she sat in it as if it were a throne. The firelight lit her face, and I saw that it was very old, waxen with age, though the glow made the wax rosy. Her dress was straight and black like a gaberdine, and she had thick folds of lace at her wrists and neck. Wonderful hair, masses of it, was piled on her head, and it was snow-white and fine as silk. Her hands were laid on the arms of the chair, and hands more delicate and shapely I have never seen, though they had also the suggestion of a furious power, like the talons of a bird of prey.

But it was the face that took away my breath. I have always been a great admirer of the beauty of old age, especially in women, but this was a beauty of which I had never dreamed. It was a long face, and the features were large, though exquisitely cut and perfectly proportioned. Usually in an old face there is a certain loosening of muscles or blurring of contours, which detracts from sheer beauty but gives another kind of charm. But in this face there was no blurring or loosening; the mouth was as firm, the curve of the chin as rounded, the arch of the eyes as triumphant as in some proud young girl.

And then I saw that the eyes which were looking at the fire were the most remarkable things of all. Even in that half-light I could see that they were brightly, vividly blue. There was no film or blearing to mar their glory. But I saw also that they were sightless. How I knew it I do not know, for there was no physical sign of it, but my conviction was instantaneous and complete. These starlike things were turned inward. In most blind people the eyes

are like marbles, dead windows in an empty house; but — how shall I describe it? — these were blinds drawn in a room which was full of light and movement, stage curtains behind which some great drama was always set. Blind though they were, they seemed to radiate an ardent vitality, to glow and flash like the soul within.

I realised that it was the most wonderful face of a woman I had ever looked on. And I realised in the same moment that I hated it, that the beauty of it was devilish, and the soul within was on fire with all the hatred of Hell.

“Hannay,” I heard Medina’s voice, “I have brought you here because I wish to present you to my mother.”

I behaved just like somebody in a play. I advanced to her chair, lifted one of the hands, and put it to my lips. That seemed to me the right thing to do. The face turned towards me, and broke into a smile, the kind of smile you may see on the marble of a Greek goddess.

The woman spoke to Medina in a tongue which was strange to me, and he replied. There seemed to be many questions and answers, but I did not trouble to try to catch a word I knew. I was occupied with the voice. I recognised in it those soft tones which had crooned over me as I lay in the room in Palmyra Square. I had discovered who had been the third person in that scene.

Then it spoke to me in English, with that odd lilting accent I had tried in vain to trace.

“You are a friend of Dominick, and I am glad to meet you, Sir Richard Hannay. My son has told me about you. Will you bring a chair and sit close to me?”

I pulled up a long low armchair, so long and low that the sitter was compelled almost to recline. My head was on a level with the hand which lay on the arm of her chair.

Suddenly I felt that hand laid on my head, and I recognised her now by touch as well as voice.

"I am blind, Sir Richard," she said, "so I cannot see my son's friends. But I long to know how they look, and I have but one sense which can instruct me. Will you permit me to pass my hands over your face?"

"You may do what you please, Madame," I said. "I would to God I could give you eyes."

"That is a pretty speech," she said. "You might be one of my own people." And I felt the light fingers straying over my brow.

I was so placed that I was looking into the red heart of the fire, the one patch of bright light in the curtained room. I knew what I was in for, and, remembering past experience, I averted my eyes to the dark folios on the lowest shelves beyond the hearth. The fingers seemed to play a gentle tattoo on my temples, and then drew long soft strokes across my eyebrows. I felt a pleasant languor beginning to creep down my neck and spine, but I was fully prepared, and without much trouble resisted it. Indeed my mind was briskly busy, for I was planning how best to play my game. I let my head recline more and more upon the cushioned back of my chair, and I let my eyelids droop.

The gentle fingers were very thorough and I had let myself sink back beyond their reach before they ceased.

"You are asleep," the voice said. "Now wake."

I was puzzled to know how to stage-manage that waking, but she saved me the trouble. Her voice suddenly hissed like a snake's. "Stand up!" it said. "Quick — on your life."

I scrambled to my feet with extreme energy, and stood staring at the fire, wondering what to do next.

"Look at your master," came the voice again, peremptory as a drill-sergeant's.

That gave me my cue. I knew where Medina was standing, and, in the words of the Bible, my eyes regarded him as a handmaiden regards her master. I stood before him, dumb and dazed and obedient.

"Down," he cried. "Down, on all-fours."

I did as I was bid, thankful that my job was proving so easy.

"Go to the door — no, on all-fours, open it twice, shut it twice, and bring me the paper-knife from the far table in your mouth."

I obeyed, and a queer sight I must have presented prancing across the room, a perfectly sane man behaving like a lunatic.

I brought the paper-knife, and remained dog-wise. "Get up," he said, and I got up.

I heard the woman's voice say triumphantly. "He is well broken," and Medina laughed.

"There is yet the last test," he said. "I may as well put him through it now. If it fails, it means only that he needs more schooling. He cannot remember, for his mind is now in my keeping. There is no danger."

He walked up to me, and gave me a smart slap in the face.

I accepted it with Christian meekness. I wasn't even angry. In fact I would have turned the other cheek in the Scriptural fashion, if it hadn't occurred to me that it might be over-acting.

Then he spat in my face.

That, I admit, tried me pretty high. It was such a filthy Kaffir trick that I had some trouble in taking it resignedly. But I managed it. I kept my eyes on the

ground, and didn't even get out my handkerchief to wipe my cheek till he had turned away.

"Well broken to heel," I heard him say. "It is strange how easily these flat tough English natures succumb to the stronger spirit. I have got a useful weapon in him, mother mine."

They paid no more attention to me than if I had been a piece of furniture, which, indeed, in their eyes I was. I was asleep, or rather awake in a phantasmal world, and I could not return to my normal life till they bade me. I could know nothing — so they thought — and remember nothing, except what they willed. Medina sat in my chair, and the woman had her hand on his head, and they talked as if they were alone in the desert. And all the while I was standing sheepishly on the rug, not daring to move, scarcely to breathe, lest I should give the show away.

They made a pretty picture—"The Prodigal's Return" or "The Old Folks at Home," by Simpkins, R.A., Royal Academy, 1887. No, by Heaven, there was no suggestion of that. It was a marvellous and tragic scene that I regarded. The fitful light of the fire showed figures of an antique beauty and dignity. The regal profile of the woman, her superb pose, and the soft eerie music of her voice were a world removed from vulgarity, and so was the lithe vigour and the proud face of the man. They were more like a king and queen in exile, decreeing the sea of blood which was to wash them back again. I realised for the first time that Medina might be damnable, but was also great. Yes, the man who had spat on me like a stable-boy had also something of the prince. I realised another thing. The woman's touch had flattened down the hair above his forehead, which he brushed square, and his

head, outlined in the firelight against the white cushion, was as round as a football. I had suspected this when I first saw him, and now I was certain. What did a head like that portend? I had a vague remembrance that I had heard somewhere that it meant madness — at any rate degeneracy.

They talked rapidly and unceasingly, but the confounded thing was that I could hear very little of it. They spoke in low tones, and I was three yards off and daren't for my life move an inch nearer. Also they spoke for the most part in a language of which I did not know a word — it may have been Choctaw, but was probably Erse. If I had only comprehended that tongue I might there and then have learned all I wanted to know. But sometimes Medina talked English, though it seemed to me that the woman always tried to bring him back to the other speech. All I heard were broken sentences that horribly tantalised me.

My brain was cool and very busy. This woman was the Blind Spinner of the rhymes. No doubt of it. I could see her spinning beside a peat fire, nursing ancient hate and madness, and crooning forgotten poetry. "*Beside the Sacred Tree.*" Yggdrasil be hanged! I had it, it was Gospel Oak. Lord, what a fool I had been not to guess it before! The satisfaction of having got one of the three conundrums dead right made me want to shout. These two harpies held the key to the whole riddle, and I had only to keep up my present character to solve it. They thought they were dealing with a hypnotised fool, and instead they had a peculiarly wide-awake, if rather slow and elderly, Englishman. I wished to Heaven I knew what they were saying. Sluicing out malice about my country, no doubt, or planning the ruin of our civilisation for the sake of a neurotic dream.

Medina said something impatiently about "danger," as if his purpose were to reassure. Then I caught nothing for several minutes, till he laughed and repeated the word "*secundus*." Now I was looking for three people, and if there was a "*secundus*" there must have been a "*primus*," and possibly a "*tertius*."

"He is the least easy to handle," he said. "And it is quite necessary that Jason should come home. I have decided that the doctor must go out. It won't be for long — only till midsummer."

The date interested me acutely. So did what followed, for he went on:

"By midsummer they liquidate and disband. There is no fear that it won't succeed. We have the whip hand, remember. Trust me, all will go smoothly, and then we begin a new life. . . ."

I thought she sighed, and for the first time she spoke in English:

"I fear sometimes that you are forgetting your own land, Dominick."

He put up an arm and drew her head to his.

"Never, mother mine. It is our strength that we can seem to forget and still remember."

I was finding my stand on that hearth-rug extraordinarily trying. You see I had to keep perfectly rigid, for every now and then Medina would look towards me, and I knew that the woman had an ear like a hound. But my knees were beginning to shake with fatigue and my head to grow giddy, and I feared that, like the soldiers who stand guard round a royal bier, I might suddenly collapse. I did my best to struggle against the growing weakness, and hoped to forget it by concentrating all my attention on the fragments of talk.

"I have news for you," Medina was saying. "Kharáma is in Europe and proposes to come to England."

"You will see him?" I thought her voice had a trace of alarm in it.

"Most certainly. I would rather see him than any living man."

"Dominick, be careful. I would rather you confined yourself to our old knowledge. I fear these new things from the East."

He laughed. "They are as old as ours — older. And all knowledge is one. I have already drunk of his learning and I must have the whole cup."

That was the last I heard, for at that moment I made my exit from the scene in a way which I could not have bettered by much cogitation. My legs suddenly gave under me, the room swam round, and I collapsed on the floor in a dead faint. I must have fallen heavily, for I knocked a leg off one of the little tables.

When I came to — which I suppose was a minute or two later — Odell was bathing my face, and Medina with a grave and concerned air was standing by with a brandy decanter.

"My dear fellow, you gave me a bad fright," he said, and his manner was that of the considerate friend. "You're not feeling ill?"

"I haven't been quite fit all day, and I suppose the hot room knocked me out. I say, I'm most awfully sorry for playing the fool like this. I've damaged your furniture, I'm afraid. I hope I didn't scare the lady."

"What lady?"

"Your mother."

He looked at me with a perfectly blank face, and I saw I had made a mistake.

"I beg your pardon — I'm still giddy. I've been dreaming."

He gave me a glass of brandy and tucked me into a taxi. Long before I got to the Club I was feeling all right, but my mind was in a fine turmoil. I had stumbled at last upon not one clue but many, and though they were confused enough, I hoped with luck to follow them out. I could hardly eat any dinner that night, and my brain was too unsettled to do any serious thinking. So I took a taxi up to Gospel Oak, and, bidding it wait for me, had another look at Palmyra Square. The place seemed to have been dead and decaying for centuries, seen in that windy moonless dark, and Number 4 was a shuttered tomb. I opened the gate and, after making sure that the coast was clear, stole round to the back-door where tradesmen called. There were some dilapidated outhouses, and the back garden, with rank grasses and obscene clothes-posts, looked like nothing so much as a neglected grave-yard. In that house was the terrible blind Fate that span. As I listened, I heard from somewhere inside the sound of slow heartbroken sobs. I wondered if they came from the queer-looking little girl.

CHAPTER IX

I AM INTRODUCED TO STRONG MAGIC

THE first thing I did when I got up next morning was to pay a visit to Harlows, the fishing-tackle people. They knew me well enough, for I used to buy my rods there, and one of the assistants had been down to Fosse to teach Mary how to use a light split-cane. With him I embarked on a long talk about Norwegian rivers and their peculiarities, and very soon got his views on the best flies. I asked which river was considered to be the earliest, and was told in an ordinary season the Nirdal and the Skarso. Then I asked if he knew my friend Doctor Newhover. "He was in here yesterday afternoon," I was told. "He is going to the Skarso this year, and hopes to be on the water in the last week of April. Rather too soon in my opinion, though salmon have been caught in it as early as April 17th. By the end of the first week of May it should be all right." I asked a good deal more about the Skarso, and was told that it was best fished from Merdal at the head of the Merdalfjord. There were only about three miles of fishable water before the big foss, but every yard of it was good. I told him I had hoped to get a beat on the Leardal for June, but had had to give up the notion this year and intended to confine myself to Scotland. I bought a new reel, a quantity of sea-trout flies, and a little book about Norwegian fishing.

Then I went on to see Macgillivray, with whom I had made an appointment by telephone.

"I've come to ask your help," I told him. "I'm begin-

ning to get a move on, but it's a ticklish business, and I must walk very warily. First of all, I want you to find out the movements of a certain Dr. Newhover of Wimpole Street. He is going to Norway some time in the next fortnight, to the Skarso to fish, and his jumping-off place will be Stavanger. Find out by which boat he takes a passage, and book me a berth in it also. I'd better have my old name, Cornelius Brand."

"You're not thinking of leaving England just now?" he asked reproachfully.

"I don't know. I may have to go or I may not, but in any case I won't be long away. Anyhow, find out about Dr. Newhover. Now for the more serious business. Just about when have you settled to round up the gang?"

"For the reasons I gave you it must be before midsummer. It is an infernally complicated job and we must work to a time-table. I had fixed provisionally the 20th of June."

"I think you'd better choose an earlier date."

"Why?"

"Because the gang are planning themselves to liquidate by midsummer, and, if you don't hurry, you may draw the net tight and find nothing in it."

"Now how on earth did you find that out?" he asked, and his usually impassive face was vivid with excitement.

"I can't tell you. I found it out in the process of hunting for the hostages, and I give you my word it's correct."

"But you must tell me more. If you have fresh lines on what you call my 'gang,' it may be desperately important for me to know."

"I haven't. I've just the one fact, which I have given you. Honestly, old man, I can't tell you anything more till I tell you everything. Believe me, I'm working hard."

I had thought the thing out, and had resolved to keep the Medina business to myself and Sandy. Our one chance with him was that he should be utterly unsuspecting, and even so wary a fellow as Macgillivray might, if he were told, create just that faint breath of suspicion that would ruin all.

He grunted, as if he were not satisfied. "I suppose you must have it your own way. Very well, we'll fix the 10th of June for *Der Tag*. You realise, of course, that the round-up of all must be simultaneous — that's why it takes such a lot of *bandobast*. By the way, you've got the same problem with the hostages. You can't release one without the others, or the show is given away — not your show only, but mine. You realise that?"

"I do," I said, "and I realise that the moving forward of your date narrows my time down to less than two months. If I succeed, I must wait till the very eve of your move. Not earlier, I suppose, than June 9th? Assume I only find one of the three? I wait till June 9th before getting him out of their clutches. Then you strike, and what happens to the other two?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The worst, I fear. You see, Dick, the gang I mean to crush and the people who hold the hostages are allied, but I take it they are different sets. I may land every member of my gang, and yet not come within speaking distance of the other lot. I don't know, but I'm pretty certain that even if we found the second lot we'd never be able to prove complicity between the two. The first are devilish deep fellows, but the second are great artists."

"All the same," I said, "I'm in hopes of finding at least one of the hostages, and that means some knowledge of the kidnappers."

"I must not ask, but I'd give my head to know how and where you're working. More power to you! But I wonder if you'll ever get near the real prime fountain of iniquity."

"I wonder," I said, and took my leave.

I had been playing with sickness, and now it looked as if I was going to be punished by getting the real thing. For all the rest of that day I felt cheap, and in the evening I was positive I had a temperature. I thought I might have flu, so I went round after dinner to see a doctor whom I had known in France. He refused to admit the temperature. "What sort of life have you been leading these last weeks?" he asked, and when I told him that I had been hanging round London waiting on some tiresome business developments, he said that that was the whole trouble. "You're accustomed to an active life in fresh air and you've been stuffing in town, feeding too well and getting no exercise. Go home to-morrow and you'll be as right as a trivet."

"It rather would suit me to be sick for a spell — say a week."

He looked puzzled and then laughed.

"Oh, if you like I'll give you a chit to say you must go back to the country at once or I won't answer for the consequences."

"I'd like that, but not just yet. I'll ring you up when I want it. Meantime I can take it that there's nothing wrong with me?"

"Nothing that a game of squash and a little Eno won't cure."

"Well, when you send me that chit, say I've got to have a quiet week in bed at home — no visitors — regular rest cure."

"Right," he said. "It's a prescription that every son of Adam might follow with advantage four times a year."

When I got back to the Club I found Medina waiting for me. It was the first time he had visited me there, and I pretended to be delighted to see him — almost embarrassed with delight — and took him to the back smoking-room where I had talked with Sandy. I told him that I was out of sorts, and he was very sympathetic. Then, with a recollection of Sandy's last letter, I started out to blaspheme my gods. He commented on the snugness and seclusion of the little room, which for the moment we had to ourselves.

"It wasn't very peaceful when I was last in it," I said. "I had a row here with that lunatic Arbuthnot before he went abroad."

He looked up at the name.

"You mean you quarrelled. I thought you were old friends."

"Once we were. Now I never want to see the fellow again." I thought I might as well do the job thoroughly, though the words stuck in my throat.

I thought he seemed pleased.

"I told you," he said, "that he didn't attract me."

"Attract!" I cried. "The man has gone entirely to the devil. He has forgotten his manners, his breeding, and everything he once possessed. He has lived so long among cringing Orientals that his head is swollen like a pumpkin. He wanted to dictate to me, and I said I would see him further — and — oh well, we had the usual row. He's gone back to the East, which is the only place for him, and — no! I never want to clap eyes on him again."

There was a purr of satisfaction in his voice, for he believed, as I meant him to, that his influence over me had

been strong enough to shatter an ancient friendship. "I am sure you are wise. I have lived in the East and know something of its ways. There is the road of knowledge and the road of illusion, and Arbuthnot has chosen the second. . . . We are friends, Hannay, and I have much to tell you some day — perhaps very soon. I have made a position for myself in the world, but the figure which the world sees is only a little part of me. The only power is knowledge, and I have attained to a knowledge compared with which Arbuthnot's is the merest smattering."

I noticed that he had dropped the easy, well-bred, deprecating manner which I had first noted in him. He spoke to me now magisterially, arrogantly, almost pompously.

"There has never been a true marriage of East and West," he went on. "To-day we incline to put a false interpretation on the word Power. We think of it in material terms like money, or the control of great patches of inanimate nature. But it still means, as it has always meant, the control of human souls, and to him who acquires that everything else is added. How does such control arise? Partly by knowledge of the intricacies of men's hearts, which is a very different thing from the stock platitudes of the professional psychologists. Partly by that natural dominion of spirit which comes from the possession of certain human qualities in a higher degree than other men. The East has the secret knowledge, but, though it can lay down the practice, it cannot provide the practitioners. The West has the tools, but not the science of their use. There has never, as I have said, been a true marriage of East and West, but when there is, its seed will rule the world."

I was drinking this in with both ears, and murmuring

my assent. Now at last I was to be given his confidence, and I prayed that he might be inspired to go on. But he seemed to hesitate, till a glance at my respectful face reassured him.

"The day after to-morrow a man will be in London, a man from the East, who is a great master of this knowledge. I shall see him, and you will accompany me. You will understand little, for you are only at the beginning, but you will be in the presence of wisdom."

I murmured that I should feel honoured.

"You will hold yourself free for all that day. The time will probably be the evening."

After that he left with the most perfunctory good-bye. I congratulated myself on having attained to just the kind of position I wanted — that of a disciple whose subjection was so much taken for granted that he was treated like a piece of furniture. From his own point of view Medina was justified; he must have thought the subconscious control so strong, after all the tests I had been through, that my soul was like putty in his hands.

Next day I went down to Fosse and told Mary to expect me back very soon for a day or two. She had never plagued me with questions, but something in my face must have told her that I was hunting a trail, for she asked me for news and looked as if she meant to have it. I admitted that I had found out something, and said I would tell her everything when I next came back. That would only have been prudent, for Mary was a genius at keeping secrets and I wanted some repository of my knowledge in case I got knocked on the head.

When I returned to town I found another note from Sandy, also from France, signed "Alan Breck" — Sandy was terribly out with his Derby winners. It was simply

two lines imploring me again to make Medina believe I had broken with him and that he had gone east of Suez for good.

There was also a line from Macgillivray, saying that Dr. Newhover had taken a passage on the *Gudrun*, leaving Hull at 6.30 P.M. on the 21st, and that a passage had been booked for C. Brand, Esqre, by the same boat. That decided me, so I wrote to my own doctor asking for the chit he had promised, to be dated the 19th. I was busy with a plan, for it seemed to me that it was my duty to follow up the one trail that presented itself, though it meant letting the rest of the business sleep. I longed more than I could say for a talk with Sandy, who was now playing the fool in France and sending me imbecile notes. I also rang up Archie Roylance, and found to my delight that he had not left town, for I ran him to ground at the 'Travellers', and fixed a meeting for next morning.

"Archie," I said, when we met, "I want to ask a great favour from you. Are you doing anything special in the next fortnight?"

He admitted that he had thought of getting back to Scotland to watch a pair of nesting greenshanks.

"Let the greenshanks alone, like a good fellow. I've probably got to go to Norway on the 21st, and I shall want to get home in the deuce of a hurry. The steamer's far too slow."

"Destroyer," he suggested.

"Hang it, this is not the War. Talk sense. I want an aeroplane, and I want you to fetch me."

Archie whistled long and loud.

"You're a surprisin' old bird, Dick. It's no joke bein' a pal of yours. . . . I daresay I could raise a bus all right.

But you've got to chance the weather. And my recollection of Norway is that it's not very well provided with landin' places. What part do you favour?"

I told him the mouth of the Merdalfjord.

"Lord! I've been there," he said. "It's all as steep as the side of a house."

"Yes, but I've been studying the map, and there are some eligible little islands off the mouth, which look flattish from the contouring. I'm desperately serious, old man. I'm engaged on a job where failure means the loss of innocent lives. I'll tell you all about it soon, but meantime you must take my word for it."

I managed to get Archie suitably impressed, and even to interest him in the adventure, for he was never the man to lag behind in anything that included risk and wanted daring. He promised to see Hansen, who had been in his squadron and was believed to have flown many times across the North Sea. As I left him I could see that he was really enormously cheered by the prospect, for if he couldn't watch his blessed birds the next best thing was to have a chance of breaking his neck.

I had expected to be bidden by Medina to meet his necromancer in some den in the East End or some Bloomsbury lodging-house. Judge of my surprise, then, when I was summoned to Claridge's for nine-thirty that evening. When I got to the hotel it was difficult to believe that a place so bright and commonplace could hold any mystery. There was the usual dancing going on, and squads of people who had dined well were sitting around watching. Medina was standing by a fireplace talking to a man who wore a long row of miniature medals and a star, and whom I recognised as Tom Machin, who had commanded a cavalry brigade in France. Medina nodded casually to

me, and Tom, whom I had not seen for years, made a great fuss.

"Regimental dinner," he explained. "Came out for a moment to give instructions about my car. Been telling Medina here of the dirty trick the Government has played on my old crowd. I say it's up to the few sahibs like him in that damned monkey-house at Westminster to make a row about it. You back me up, Hannay. What I say is . . ." and so on with all the eternal iteration of "abso-lutely" and "If you follow me" and "You see what I mean" of the incoherent British regular.

Medina gently disengaged himself. "Sorry, Tom, but I must be off now. You're dining with Burminster on Thursday, aren't you? We'll talk about that business then. I agree it's an infernal shame."

He signed to me and we went together to the lift. On the first floor, where the main suites are, a turbaned Indian waited for us in the corridor. He led us into a little ante-room, and then disappeared through big folding-doors. I wondered what kind of swell this Oriental necromancer must be who could take rooms like these, for the last time I had been in them was when they were occupied by a Crown Prince who wanted to talk to me about a certain little problem in Anatolia.

"You are about to see Kharáma," Medina whispered, and there was an odd exaltation in his voice. "You do not know his name, but there are millions in the East who reverence it like that of a god. I last saw him in a hut on the wildest pass in the Karakoram, and now he is in this gilded hotel with the dance-music of the West jiggling below. It is a parable of the unity of all Power."

The door was opened, and the servant beckoned us to enter. It was a large room furnished with the usual indif-

ferent copies of French furniture — very hot and scented, just the kind of place where international financiers make their deals over liqueur brandy and big cigars, or itinerant stars of the cinema world receive their friends. Bright, hard and glossy, you would have said that no vulgarer environment could be found. . . . And yet after the first glance I did not feel its commonness, for it was filled with the personality of the man who sat on a couch at the far end. I realised that here was one who carried with him his own prepotent atmosphere, and who could transform his surroundings, whether it was a Pamir hut or a London restaurant.

To my surprise he was quite young. His hair was hidden by a great turban, but the face was smooth and hairless, and the figure, so far as I could judge, had not lost the grace of youth. I had imagined some one immensely venerable and old with a beard to his girdle, or, alternately, an obese babu with a soft face like a eunuch. I had forgotten that this man was of the hills. To my amazement he wore ordinary evening dress, well-cut too, I thought, and over it a fine silk dressing-gown. He had his feet tucked up on the couch, but he did not sit cross-legged. At our entrance he slightly inclined his head, while we both bowed. Medina addressed him in some Indian tongue, and he replied, and his voice was like the purr of a big cat.

He motioned us to sit down, looking not so much at us as through us, and while Medina spoke I kept my eyes on his face. It was the thin, high-boned, high-bred face of the hillman; not the Mongolian type, but that other which is like an Arab, the kind of thing you can see in Pathan troops. And yet, though it was as hard as flint and as fierce as Satan, there was a horrid feline softness

in it, like that of a man who would never need to strike a blow in anger, since he could win his way otherwise. The brow was straight and heavy, such as I had always associated with mathematical talent, and broader than is common with Orientals. The eyes I could not see, for he kept them half shut, but there was something uncanny in the way they were chased in his head, with an odd slant the opposite from what you see in the Chinaman. His mouth had a lift at each corner as if he were perpetually sneering, and yet there was a hint of humour in the face, though it was as grave as a stone statue.

I have rarely seen a human being at once so handsome and so repulsive, but both beauty and horror were merged in the impression of ruthless power. I had been sceptical enough about this Eastern mage, as I had been sceptical about Medina's arts, because they had failed with me. But as I looked on that dark countenance I had a vision of a world of terrible knowledge, a hideousness like an evil smell, but a power like a blasting wind or a pestilence. . . . Somehow Sandy's talk at the Thursday Club dinner came back to me, about the real danger to the world lying in the constraint of spirit over spirit. This swarthy brute was the priest of that obscene domination, and I had an insane desire there and then to hammer him into pulp.

He was looking at me, and seemed to be asking a question to which Medina replied. I fancy he was told that I was a *chela*, or whatever was the right name, a well-broken and submissive disciple.

Then to my surprise he spoke in English — good English, with the *chi-chi* accent of the Indian.

"You have followed far in the path of knowledge, brother. I did not think a son of the West could have

travelled so far and so soon. You have won two of the three keys to Mastery, if you can make a man forget his past, and begin life anew subject to your will. But what of the third key?"

I thought Medina's voice had a tinge of disappointment. "It is the third key which I look for, master. What good is it to wipe out the past and establish my control if it is only temporary? I want the third key, to lock the door, so that I have my prisoner safe forever. Is there such a key?"

"The key is there, but to find it is not easy. All control tends to grow weak and may be broken by an accident, except in the case of young children, and some women, and those of feeble mind."

"That I know," said Medina almost pettishly. "But I do not want to make disciples only of babes, idiots, and women."

"Only some women, I said. Among our women perhaps all, but among Western women, who are hard as men, only the softer and feebler."

"That is my trouble. I wish to control forever, and to control without constant watching on my part. I have a busy life and time is precious. Tell me, master, is there a way?"

I listened to this conversation with feelings of genuine horror. Now I saw Medina's plans, and I realised that he and he alone was at the bottom of the kidnapping. I realised, too, how he had dealt with the three hostages, and how he proposed to deal. Compared to him a murderer was innocent, for a murderer only took life, while he took the soul. I hated him and that dark scoundrel more intensely than I think I have ever hated man; indeed it was only by a great effort that I checked myself from clutching

the two by the throat. The three stories, which had been half forgotten and overlaid by my recent experiences, returned sharp and clear to my memory. I saw again Victor's haggard face, I heard Sir Arthur Warcliff's voice break; and my wrath rose and choked me. This stealing of souls was the worst infamy ever devised by devils among mankind. I must have showed my emotion, but happily the two had no eyes for me.

"There is a way, a sure way," the Indian was saying, and a wicked half-smile flitted over his face. "But it is a way which, though possible in my own country, may be difficult in yours. I am given to understand that your police are troublesome, and you have a public repute which it is necessary to cherish. There is another way which is slower, but which is also sure, if it is boldly entered upon."

The sage seemed to open his half-shut eyes, and I thought I saw the opaque brightness which comes from drug-taking.

"Him whom you would make your slave," he said, "you first strip of memory, and then attune to your own will. To keep him attuned you must be with him often and reinforce the control. But this is burdensome, and if the slave be kept apart and seen rarely the influence will ebb — except, as I have said, in the case of a young child. There is a way to rivet the bondage and it is this. Take him or her whom you govern into the same life as they have been accustomed to live before, and there, among familiar things, assert your control. Your influence will thus acquire the sanction of familiarity — for though the conscious memory has gone, the unconscious remains — and presently will be a second nature."

"I see," said Medina abstractedly. "I had already

guessed as much. Tell me, master, can the dominion, once it is established, be shaken off?"

"It cannot save by the will of him who exercises it. Only the master can release."

After that they spoke again in the foreign tongue of I know not what devilry. It seemed to me that the sage was beginning to tire of the interview, for he rang a bell and when the servant appeared gave him some rapid instructions. Medina rose, and kissed the hand which was held out to him, and I, of course, followed suit.

"You stay here long, master?" he asked.

"Two days. Then I have business in Paris and elsewhere. But I return in May, when I will summon you again. Prosper, brother. The God of Wisdom befriend you."

We went downstairs to the dancing and the supper parties. The regimental dinner was breaking up and Tom Machin was holding forth in the hall to a knot of be-medalled friends. I had to say something to Medina to round off the evening, and the contrast of the two scenes seemed to give me a cue. As we were putting on our coats I observed that it was like coming from light to darkness. He approved. "Like falling from a real world into shadows," he said.

He evidently wished to follow his own thoughts, for he did not ask me to walk home with him. I, too, had a lot to think about. When I got back to the Club I found a note signed "Spion Kop," and with an English postmark.

Meet me [it said], on the 21st for breakfast at the inn called "The Silent Woman" on the Fosse Way as you go over from Colne to Windrush. I have a lot to tell you.

I thanked Heaven that Sandy was home again, though

he chose fantastic spots for his assignations. I, too, had something to say to him. For that evening had given me an insight into Medina's mind, and, what was more, the glimmerings of a plan of my own.

CHAPTER X

CONFIDENCES AT A WAYSIDE INN

My first impulse was to go to Macgillivray about this Kahráma fellow, who I was certain was up to mischief. I suspected him of some kind of political intrigue; otherwise what was he doing touring the capitals of Europe and putting up at expensive hotels? But on second thoughts I resolved to let the police alone. I could not explain about Kahráma without bringing in Medina, and I was determined to do nothing which would stir a breath of suspicion against him. But I got the chit from my doctor, recommending a week's rest, and I went round to see Medina on the morning of the 19th. I told him I had been feeling pretty cheap for some days and that my doctor ordered me to go home and go to bed. He didn't look pleased, so I showed him the doctor's letter, and made a poor mouth, as if I hated the business but was torn between my inclinations and my duty. I think he liked my producing that chit, like a second-lieutenant asking for leave, anyhow he made the best of it and was quite sympathetic. "I'm sorry you're going out of town," he said, "for I want you badly. But it's as well to get quite fit, and to lie up for a week ought to put you all right. When am I to expect you back?" I told him that without fail I would be in London on the 29th. "I'm going to disappear into a monastery," I said. "Write no letters, receive none, not at home to visitors, only sleep and eat. I can promise you that my wife will watch me like a dragon."

Then I hunted up Archie Roylance, whom I found on

the very top of his form. He had seen Hansen, and discovered that on the island of Flacksholm, just off the mouth of the Merdalfjord, there was good landing. It was a big flattish island with a loch in the centre, and entirely uninhabited except for a farm at the south end. Archie had got a machine, a Sopwith, which he said he could trust, and I arranged with him to be at Flacksholm not later than the 27th, and to camp there as best he could. He was to keep watch by day for a motor-boat from the Merdalfjord, and at night if he saw a green light he was to make for it. I told him to take ample supplies, and he replied that he wasn't such a fool as to neglect the commissariat. He said he had been to Fortnum & Mason and was going to load up with liqueurs and *delicatessen*. "Take all the clothes you've got, Dick," he added. "It will be perishing cold in those parts at this time of year." He arranged, too, to cable through Hansen for a motor-launch to be ready at Stavanger for a Mr. Brand who was due by the Hull steamer on the morning of the 23d. If I had to change my plans I was to wire him at once.

That evening I went down to Fosse a little easier in my mind. It was a blessed relief to get out of London and smell clean air, and to reflect that for a week at any rate I should be engaged in a more congenial job than loafing about town. I found Peter John in the best of health and the Manor garden a glory of spring flowers.

I told Mary that I was ordered by my doctor to go to bed for a week and take a rest cure.

"Dick," she asked anxiously, "you're not ill, are you?"

"Not a bit, only a trifle stale. But officially I'm to be in bed for a week and not a blessed soul is to be allowed to come near me. Tell the servants, please, and get the cook

on to invalid dishes. I'll take Paddock into my confidence, and he'll keep up a show of waiting on me."

"A show?"

"Yes, for you see I'm going to put in a week in Norway — that is, unless Sandy has anything to say against it."

"But I thought Colonel Arbuthnot was still abroad?"

"So he is — officially. But I'm going to breakfast with him the day after to-morrow at the Silent Woman — you remember, the inn we used to have supper at last summer when I was fishing the Colne."

"Dick," she said solemnly, "isn't it time you told me a little more about what you're doing?"

"I think it is," I agreed, and that night after dinner I told her everything.

She asked a great many questions, searching questions, for Mary's brain was about twice as good as mine. Then she sat pondering for a long time with her chin on her hand.

"I wish I had met Mr. Medina," she said at last. "Aunt Claire and Aunt Doria know him. . . . I am afraid of him, terribly afraid, and I think I should be less afraid if I could just see him once. It is horrible, Dick, and you are fighting with such strange weapons. Your only advantage is that you're such a gnarled piece of oak. Oh, I wish I could help. It's dreadful to have to wait here and be tortured by anxiety for you, and to be thinking all the time of those poor people. I can't get the little boy out of my head. I often wake in a terror, and have to go up to the night-nursery to hug Peter John. Nanny must think I'm mad. . . . I suppose you're right to go to Norway?"

"I see no other way. We have a clue to the whereabouts of one of the hostages — I haven't a notion which.

I must act on that, and besides, if I find one it may give me a line on the others."

"There will still be two lost," she said, "and the time grows fearfully short. You are only one man. Can you not get helpers? Mr. Macgillivray?"

"No. He has his own job, and to let him into mine would wreck both."

"Well, Colonel Arbuthnot? What is he doing?"

"Oh, Sandy's busy enough, and thank God! he's back in England. I'll know more about his game when I see him, but you may be sure it's a deep one. While I'm away Sandy will be working all the time."

"Do you know, I have never met him. Couldn't I see him some time when you're away? It would be a great comfort to me. And oh, Dick, can't I help somehow? We've always shared everything, even before we were married, and you know I'm dependable."

"Indeed I do, my darling," I said. "But I can't see how you can help — yet. If I could, I would inspan you straight off, for I would rather have you with me than a regiment."

"It's the poor little boy. I could endure the rest, but the thought of him makes me crazy. Have you seen Sir Arthur?"

"No, I have avoided him. I can stand the sight of Victor and the Duke, but I swear I shall never look Sir Arthur in the face unless I can hand him over his son."

Then Mary got up and stood over me like a delivering angel.

"It is going to be done," she cried. "Dick, you must never give up. I believe in my heart we shall win. We must win or I shall never be able to kiss Peter John again with a quiet mind. Oh, I wish — I wish I could do something."

I don't think Mary slept that night, and next morning she was rather pale and her eyes had that funny long-sighted look that they had had when I said good-bye to her at Amiens in March, '18, before going up to the line.

I spent a blissful day with her and Peter John wandering round our little estate. It was one of those April days which seem to have been borrowed from late May, when you have the warmth of summer joined with the austerity and fresh colouring of spring. The riot of daffodils under the trees was something to thank God for, the banks of the little lake were one cascade of grape hyacinths, blue and white, and every dell in the woods was bright with primroses. We occupied the morning deepening the pools in a tiny stream which was to be one of the spawning-grounds for the new trout in the lake, and Peter John showed conspicuous talent as an hydraulic engineer. His nurse, who was a middle-aged Scotswoman from the Cheviots, finally carried him off for his morning rest, and when he had gone, Mary desisted from her watery excavations and sat down on a bank of periwinkles.

"What do you really think of Nanny?" she asked.

"About as good as they make," I replied.

"That's what I think too. You know, Dick, I feel I'm far too fussy about Peter John. I give hours of my time to him, and it's quite unnecessary. Nanny can do everything better than I can. I scarcely dare let him out of my sight, and yet I'm certain that I could safely leave him for weeks with Nanny and Paddock — and Dr. Green-slade within call."

"Of course you could," I agreed, "but you'd miss him, as I do, for he's jolly good company."

"Yes, he's jolly good company, the dear fellow," she said.

In the afternoon we went for a canter on the downs, and I came back feeling as fit as a race-horse and keyed up for anything. But that evening, as we walked in the garden before dinner, I had another fit of longing to be free of the business and to return to my quiet life. I realised that I had buried my heart in my pleasant acres, and the thought of how much I loved them made me almost timid. I think Mary understood what I was feeling, for she insisted on talking about David Warcliff, and before I went to bed had worked me into that honest indignation which is the best stiffener of resolution. She went over my plans with me very carefully. On the 28th, if I could manage it, I was to come home, but if I was short of time I was to send her a wire and go straight to London. The pretence of my being in bed was to be religiously kept up. For safety's sake I was to sign every wire with the name of Cornelius.

Very early next morning, long before any one was stirring, I started the big Vauxhall with Paddock's assistance, and, accompanied by a very modest kit, crept down the avenue. Paddock, who could drive a car, was to return to the house about ten o'clock, and explain to my chauffeur that by my orders he had taken the Vauxhall over to Oxford as a loan for a week to a friend of mine. I drove fast out of the silent hill roads and on to the great Roman way which lay like a strap across the highlands. It was not much after six o'clock when I reached the Silent Woman, which sat like an observation post on a ridge of down, at a junction of four roads. Smoke was going up from its chimneys, so I judged that Sandy had ordered early breakfast. Presently, as I was garaging the car in an outhouse, Sandy appeared in flannel bags and a tweed jacket, looking as fresh as paint and uncommonly sunburnt.

"I hope you're hungry," he said. "Capital fellow the landlord! He knows what a man's appetite is. I ordered eggs, kidneys, sausages and cold ham, and he seemed to expect it. Yes. These are my headquarters for the present, though Advanced G.H.Q. is elsewhere. By the by, Dick, just for an extra precaution, my name's Thomson — Alexander Thomson — and I'm a dramatic critic taking a belated Easter holiday."

The breakfast was as good as Sandy had promised, and what with the run in the fresh air and the sight of him opposite me I began to feel light-hearted.

"I got your letters," I said, "but, I say, your knowledge of Derby winners is pretty rocky. I thought that was the kind of information no gentleman was without."

"I'm the exception. Did you act on them?"

"I told Medina I had broken with you for good and never wanted to see your face again. But why did you make such a point of it?"

"Simply because I wanted to be rid of his attentions, and I reckoned that if he thought we had quarrelled and that I had gone off for good, he might let me alone. You see he has been trying hard to murder me."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "When?"

"Four times," said Sandy calmly, counting on his fingers. "Once before I left London. Oh, I can tell you I had an exciting departure. Three times in Paris, the last time only four days ago. I fancy he's off my trail now, for he really thinks I sailed from Marseilles the day before yesterday."

"But why on earth?"

"Well, I made some ill-advised remarks at the Thursday Club dinner. He believes that I'm the only man alive who might uncover him, and he won't sleep peacefully

till he knows that I am out of Europe and is convinced that I suspect nothing. I sent you those letters because I wanted to be let alone, seeing I had a lot to do, and nothing wastes time like dodging assassins. But my chief reason was to protect *you*. You mayn't know it, Dick, but you've been walking for three weeks on the edge of a precipice with one foot nearly over. You've been in the most hideous danger, and I was never more relieved in my life than when I saw your solemn old face this morning. You were only safe when he regarded our friendship as broken and me out of the way and you his blind and devoted slave."

"I'm that all right," I said. "There's been nothing like it since 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' "

"Good. That's the great thing, for it gives us a post in the enemy's citadel. But we're only at the beginning of a tremendous fight and there's no saying how it will go. Have you sized up Medina?"

"Only a little bit. Have you?"

"I'm on the road. He's the most complex thing I've ever struck. But now we've got to pool our knowledge. Shall I start?"

"Yes. Begin at the Thursday dinner. What started you off then? I could see that something he said intrigued you."

"I must begin before that. You see, I'd heard a good deal about Medina up and down the world and couldn't for the life of me place him. Everybody swore by him, but I had always a queer feeling about the man. I told you about Lavater. Well, I had nothing to go upon there except the notion that his influence upon my friend had been bad. So I began making inquiries, and, as you know, I've more facilities than most people for finding things

out. I was curious to know what he had been doing during the War. The ordinary story was that he had been for the first two years pretty well lost in Central Asia, where he had gone on a scientific expedition, and that after that he had been with the Russians, and had finished up by doing great work with Denikin. I went into that story and discovered that he had been in Central Asia all right, but had never been near any fighting front and had never been within a thousand miles of Denikin. That's what I meant when I told you that I believed the man was one vast lie."

"He made everybody believe it."

"That's the point. He made the whole world believe what he wanted. Therefore he must be something quite out of the common — a propagandist of genius. That was my first conclusion. But how did he work? He must have a wonderful organisation, but he must have something more — the kind of personality which can diffuse itself like an atmosphere and which, like an electric current, is not weakened by distance. He must also have unique hypnotic powers. I had made a study of that in the East and had discovered how little we know here about the compulsion of spirit by spirit. That, I have always believed, is to-day, and ever has been, the true magic. You remember I said something about that at the Thursday dinner?"

I nodded. "I suppose you did it to try him?"

"Yes. It wasn't very wise, for I might easily have frightened him. But I was luckier than I deserved, and I drew from him a tremendous confession."

"The Latin quotation?"

"The Latin quotation. *Sit vini abstemius qui hermeneuma tentat aut hominum petit dominatum*. I nearly

had a fit when I heard it. Listen, Dick. I've always had a craze for recondite subjects, and when I was at Oxford I wasted my time on them when I should have been working for my schools. I only got a third in Greats, but I acquired a lot of unusual information. One of my subjects was Michael Scott. Yes — the wizard, only he wasn't a wizard, but a very patient and original thinker. He was a Borderer like me, and I started out to write a life of him. I kept up the study, and when I was at the Paris Embassy I spent my leisure tracking him through the libraries of Europe. Most of his works were published in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and mighty dull they are, but there are some still in manuscript, and I had always the hope of discovering more, for I was positive that the real Michael Scott was something far bigger than the translator and commentator whom we know. I believed that he taught the mad Emperor Ferdinand some queer things, and that the centre of his teaching was just how one human soul could control another. Well, as it turned out, I was right. I found some leaves of manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, which I was certain were to be attributed to Michael. One of his best-known works, you remember, is the 'Physionomia,' but that is only a version of Aristotle. This, too, was part of a 'Physionomia,' and a very different thing from the other, for it purported to give the essence of the 'Secreta Secretorum' — it would take too long to explain about that — and the teaching of the Therapeutæ, with Michael's own comments. It is a manual of the arts of spiritual control — oh, amazingly up-to-date, I assure you, and a long way ahead of our foolish psycho-analysts. Well, that quotation of Medina's comes from that fragment — the rare word 'hermeneuma' caught my attention as soon as he uttered it. That proves

that Medina was a student of Michael Scott, and showed me what was the bent of his mind."

"Well, he gave himself away then, and you didn't."

"Oh yes, I did. You remember I asked him if he knew the *guru* who lived at the foot of the Shansi pass as you go over to Kaikand? That was a bad blunder, and it is on account of that question that he has been trying to remove me from the earth. For it was from that *guru* that he learned most of his art."

"Was the *guru's* name Kharáma?" I asked.

Sandy stared as if he had seen a ghost.

"Now how on earth do you know that?"

"Simply because I spent an hour with him and Medina a few nights ago."

"The devil you did! Kharáma in London! Lord, Dick, this is an awesome business. Quick, tell me every single thing that passed."

I told him as well as I remembered, and he seemed to forget his alarm and to be well satisfied. "This is tremendously important. You see the point of Medina's talk? He wants to rivet his control over those three unfortunate devils, and to do that he is advised to assert it in some environment similar to that of their past lives. That gives us a chance to get on their track. And the control can only be released by him who first imposed it! I happened to know that, but I was not sure that Medina knew it. It is highly important to have found this out."

"Finish your story," I begged him. "I want to know what you have been doing abroad?"

"I continued my studies in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and I found that, as I suspected, Medina, or somebody like him, had got on to the Michael Scott MS. and had had a transcript made of it. I pushed my researches fur-

ther, for Michael wasn't the only pebble on the beach, though he was the biggest. Lord, Dick, it's a queer business in a problem like ours to have to dig for help in the débris of the Middle Ages. I found out something — not much, but something."

"And then?"

"Oh, all the time I was making inquiries about Medina's past — not very fruitful — I've told you most of the results. Then I went to see Ram Dass — you remember my speaking about him. I thought he was in Munich, but I found him in Westphalia, keeping an eye on the German industrials. Don't go to Germany for a holiday, Dick; it's a sad country and a comfortless. I had to see Ram Dass, for he happens to be the brother of Kharáma."

"What size of a fellow is Kharáma?" I asked.

Sandy's reply was: "For knowledge of the practice unequalled, but only a second-class practitioner" — exactly what Medina had said.

"Ram Dass told me most of what I wanted to know. But he isn't aware that his brother is in Europe. I rather fancy he thinks he is dead. . . . That's all I need tell you now. Fire away, Dick, and give me an exact account of your own doings."

I explained as best I could the gradual change in Medina's manner from friendship to proprietorship. I told how he had begun to talk freely to me, as if I were a disciple, and I described that extraordinary evening in Hill Street when I had met his mother.

"His mother!" Sandy exclaimed, and made me go over every incident several times — the slap in the face, the spitting, my ultimate fainting. He seemed to enjoy it immensely. "Good business," he said. "You never did a better day's work, old man."

"I have found the Blind Spinner at any rate," I said.

"Yes. I had half-guessed it. I didn't mention it, but when I got into the house in Gospel Oak as the electric-light man, I found a spinning-wheel in the back room, and they had been burning peat on the hearth. Well, that's Number One."

"I think I am on my way to find Number Two," I said, and I told him of the talk I had overheard between the two about *secundus* and sending "the doctor" somewhere, and of how I had discovered that Dr. Newhover was starting this very day for the Skarso. "It's the first clear clue," I said, "and I think I ought to follow it up."

"Yes. What do you propose to do?"

"I am travelling this evening on the *Gudrun* and I'm going to trail the fellow till I find out his game. I'm bound to act upon what little information we've got."

"I agree. But this means a long absence from London, and *secundus* is only one of three."

"Just a week," I said. "I've got sick leave from Medina for a week, and I'm supposed to be having a rest cure at Fosse, with Mary warding off visitors. I've arranged with Archie Roylance to pick me up in an aeroplane about the 28th and bring me back. It doesn't allow me much time, but an active man can do the deuce of a lot in a week."

"Bravo!" he cried. "That's your old moss-trooping self!"

"Do you approve?"

"Entirely. And, whatever happens, you present yourself to Medina on the 29th? That leaves us about six weeks for the rest of the job."

"More like five," I said gloomily, and I told him how I had learnt that the gang proposed to liquidate by mid-

summer, and that Macgillivray had therefore moved the date when he would take action ten days forward. "You see how we are placed. He must collect all the gang at the same moment, and we must release all three hostages, if we can, at the same time. The releasing mustn't be done too soon or it will warn the gang. Therefore if Macgillivray strikes on the 10th of June, we must be ready to strike not earlier than the 9th and, of course, not later."

"I see," he said, and was silent for a little. "Have you anything more to tell me?"

I ransacked my memory and remembered about Odell. He wrote down the name of the dancing club where I had seen that unprepossessing butler. I mentioned that I had asked Macgillivray to get on to his *dossier*.

"You haven't told Macgillivray too much?" he inquired anxiously and seemed relieved when I replied that I had never mentioned the Medina business.

"Well, here's the position," he said at last. "You go off for a week hunting Number Two. We are pretty certain that we have got Number One. Number Three — that nonsense about the fields of Eden and the Jew with a dyed beard in a curiosity shop in Marylebone — still eludes us. And of course we have as yet no word of any of the three hostages. There's a terrible lot still to do. How do you envisage the thing, Dick? Do you think of the three, the girl, the young man, and the boy, shut up somewhere and guarded by Medina's minions? Do you imagine that if we find their places of concealment we shall have done the job?"

"That was my idea."

He shook his head. "It is far subtler than that. Did no one ever tell you that the best way of hiding a person is to strip him of his memory? Why is it that when a man

loses his memory he is so hard to find? You see it constantly in the newspapers. Even a well-known figure, if he loses his memory and wanders away, is only discovered by accident. The reason is that the human personality is identified far less by appearance than by its habits and mind. Loss of memory means the loss of all true marks of identification, and the physical look alters to correspond. Medina has stolen these three poor souls' memories and set them adrift like waifs. David Warcliff may at this moment be playing in a London gutter along with a dozen guttersnipes and his own father could scarcely pick him out from the rest. Mercot may be a dock labourer or a deck hand, whom you wouldn't recognise if you met him, though you had sat opposite him in a college hall every night for a year. And Miss Victor may be in a gaiety chorus or a milliner's assistant or a girl in a dancing saloon. . . . Wait a minute. You saw Odell at a dance-club? There may be something in that." I could see his eyes abstracted in thought.

"There's another thing I forgot to mention," I said. "Miss Victor's fiancé is over here, staying in Carlton House Terrace. He is old Turpin, who used to be with the division — the Marquis de la Tour du Pin."

Sandy wrote the name down. "Her fiancé. He may come in useful. What sort of fellow?"

"Brave as a lion, but he'll want watching, for he's a bit of a Gascon."

We went out after breakfast and sat in an arbour looking down a shallow side-valley to the upper streams of the Windrush. The sounds of morning were beginning to rise from the little village far away in the bottom, the jolt of a waggon, the "clink-clenk" from the smithy, the babble of children at play. In a fortnight the may-fly would be

here, and every laburnum and guelder rose in bloom. Sandy, who had been away from England for years, did not speak for a long time, but drank in the sweet, scented peace of it. "Poor devil," he said at last. "He has nothing like this to love. He can only hate."

I asked whom he was talking about, and he said "Medina."

"I'm trying to understand him. You can't fight a man unless you understand him, and in a way sympathise with him."

"Well, I can't say I sympathise with him, and I most certainly don't understand him."

"Do you remember once telling me that he had no vanity? You were badly out there. He has a vanity which amounts to delirium."

"This is how I read him," he went on. "To begin with, there's a far-away streak of the Latin in him, but he is mainly Irish, and that never makes a good cross. He's the *déraciné* Irish, such as you find in America. I take it that he imbibed from that terrible old woman — I've never met her, but I see her plainly and I know that she is terrible — he imbibed that venomous hatred of imaginary things — an imaginary England, an imaginary civilisation, which they call love of country. There is no love in it. They think there is, and sentimentalise about an old simplicity, and spinning wheels and turf fires and an uncouth language, but it's all hollow. There's plenty of decent plain folk in Ireland, but his kind of *déraciné* is a ghastly throw-back to something you find in the dawn of history, hollow and cruel like the fantastic gods of their own myths. Well, you start with this ingrained hate."

"I agree about the old lady. She looked like Lady Macbeth."

"But hate soon becomes conceit. If you hate, you despise, and when you despise you esteem inordinately the self which despises. This is how I look at it, but remember, I'm still in the dark and only feeling my way to an understanding. I see Medina growing up — I don't know in what environment — conscious of great talents and immense good looks, flattered by those around him till he thinks himself a god. His hatred does not die, but it is transformed into a colossal egotism and vanity, which, of course, is a form of hate. He discovers quite early that he has this remarkable hypnotic power — Oh, you may laugh at it, because you happen to be immune from it, but it is a big thing in the world for all that. He discovers another thing — that he has an extraordinary gift of attracting people and making them believe in him. Some of the worst scoundrels in history have had it. Now, remember his vanity. It makes him want to play the biggest game. He does not want to be a king among pariahs; he wants to be the ruler of what is most strange to him, what he hates and in an unwilling bitter way admires. So he aims at conquering the very heart, the very soundest part of our society. Above all he wants to be admired by men and admitted into the innermost circle."

"He has succeeded all right," I said.

"He has succeeded, and that is the greatest possible tribute to his huge cleverness. Everything about him is dead right — clothes, manner, modesty, accomplishments. He has made himself an excellent sportsman. Do you know why he shoots so well, Dick? By faith — or fatalism, if you like. His vanity doesn't allow him to believe that he could miss. . . . But he governs himself strictly. In his life he is practically an ascetic, and though he is adored by women he doesn't care a straw for them.

There are no lusts of the flesh in that kind of character. He has one absorbing passion which subdues all others — what our friend Michael Scott called ‘hominum dominatus.’”

“I see that. But how do you explain the other side?”

“It is all the ancestral hate. First of all, of course, he has got to have money, so he gets it in the way Macgillivray knows about. Second, he wants to build up a regiment of faithful slaves. That’s where you come in, Dick. There is always that inhuman hate at the back of his egotism. He wants to conquer in order to destroy, for destruction is the finest meat for his vanity. You’ll find the same thing in the lives of Eastern tyrants, for when a man aspires to be like God he becomes an incarnate devil.”

“It is a tough proposition,” I observed dismally.

“It would be an impossible proposition, but for one thing. He is always in danger of giving himself away out of sheer arrogance. Did you ever read the old Irish folklore? Very beautiful it is, but there is always something fantastic and silly which mars the finest stories. They lack the grave good-sense which you find in the Norse sagas and, of course, in the Greek. Well, he has this freakish element in his blood. That is why he sent out that rhyme about the three hostages, which by an amazing concatenation of chances put you on to his trail. Our hope is — and, mind you, I think it is a slender hope — that his vanity may urge him to further indiscretions.”

“I don’t know how you feel about it,” I said, “but I’ve got a pretty healthy hatred for that lad. I’m longing for a quiet life, but I swear I won’t settle down again till I’ve got even with him.”

“You never will,” said Sandy solemnly. “Don’t let’s

flatter ourselves that you and I are going to down Medina. We are not. A very wise man once said to me that in this life you could often get success, if you didn't want victory. In this case we're out for success only. We want to release the hostages. Victory we can never hope for. Why, man, supposing we succeed fully, we'll never be able to connect Medina with the thing. His tools are faithful, because he has stolen their souls and they work blindly under him. Supposing Macgillivray rounds up all the big gang and puts the halter round their necks. There will be none of them to turn King's evidence and give Medina away. Why? Because none of them *know* anything against him. They're his unconscious agents, and very likely most have never seen him. And you may be pretty sure that his banking accounts are too skilfully arranged to show anything."

"All the same," I said stubbornly, "I have a notion that I'll be able to put a spoke in his wheel."

"Oh, I daresay we can sow suspicion, but I believe he'll be too strong for us. He'll advance in his glorious career, and may become Prime Minister — or Viceroy of India — what a chance the second would be for him! — and publish exquisite little poetry books, as finished and melancholy as 'The Shropshire Lad.' Pessimism, you know, is often a form of vanity."

At midday it was time for me to be off, if I was to be at Hull by six o'clock. I asked Sandy what he proposed to do next, and he said he was undecided. "My position," he said, "badly cramps my form. It would be ruination if Medina knew I was in England — ruination for both you and me. Mr. Alexander Thomson must lie very low. I must somehow get in touch with Macgillivray to hear if he has anything about Odell. I rather fancy Odell.

But there will probably be nothing doing till you come back, and I think I'll have a little fishing."

"Suppose I want to get hold of you?"

"Suppose nothing of the kind. You mustn't make any move in my direction. That's our only safety. If I want you I'll come to you."

As I was starting he said suddenly: "I've never met your wife, Dick. What about my going over to Fosse and introducing myself?"

"The very thing," I cried. "She is longing to meet you. But remember that I'm supposed to be lying sick upstairs."

As I looked back he was waving his hand, and his face wore its familiar elfish smile.

CHAPTER XI

HOW A GERMAN ENGINEER FOUND STRANGE FISHING

I GOT to Hull about six o'clock, having left my car at a garage in York, and finished the journey by train. I had my kit in a small suit-case and rucksack, and I waited on the quay till I saw Dr. Newhover arrive with a lot of luggage and a big rod-box. When I reckoned he would be in his cabin arranging his belongings, I went on board myself, and went straight to my own cabin, which was a comfortable two-berthed one well forward. There I had sandwiches brought me, and settled myself to doze and read for thirty-six hours.

All that night and all next day it blew fairly hard, and I remained quietly in my bunk, trying to read Boswell's "Life of Johnson," and thanking my stars that I hadn't lived a thousand years earlier and been a Viking. I didn't see myself ploughing those short steep seas in an open galley. I woke on the morning of the 23d to find the uneasy motion at an end, and, looking out of my port-hole, saw a space of green sunlit water, a rocky beach, and the white and red of a little town. The *Gudrun* waited about an hour at Stavanger, so I gave Dr. Newhover time to get on shore, before I had a hurried breakfast in the saloon and followed him. I saw him go off with two men, and get on board a motor-launch which was lying beside one of the jetties. The coast was now clear, so I went into the town, found the agents to whom Archie Roylance had cabled, and learned that my own motor-launch was ready and

waiting in the inner harbour where the fishing-boats lie. A clerk took me down there, and introduced me to Johan, my skipper, a big, cheerful, bearded Norwegian, who had a smattering of English. I bought a quantity of provisions, and by ten o'clock we were on the move. I asked Johan about the route to Merdal, and he pointed out a moving speck a couple of miles ahead of us. "That is Kristian Egge's boat," he said. "He carries an English fisherman to Merdal and we follow." I got my glasses on the craft, and made out Newhover smoking in the stern.

It was a gorgeous day, with that funny Northern light which makes noon seem like early morning. I enjoyed every hour of it, partly because I had now a definite job before me, and partly because I was in the open air to which I properly belonged. I got no end of amusement watching the wild life — the cormorants and eider duck on the little islands, and the seals, with heads as round as Medina's, that slipped off the skerries at our approach. The air was chilly and fresh, but when we turned the corner of the Merdalfjord out of the sea-wind and the sun climbed the sky it was as warm as June. A big flat island we passed, all short turf and rocky outcrops, was pointed out to me by Johan as Flacksholm. Soon we were shaping due east in an inlet which was surrounded by dark steep hills, with the snow lying in the gullies. I had Boswell with me in two volumes; the first I had read in the steamer, and the second I was now starting on, when it fell overboard, through my getting up in a hurry to look at a flock of duck. So I presented the odd volume to Johan, and surrendered myself to tobacco and meditation.

In the afternoon the inlet narrowed to a fjord, and the walls of hill grew steeper. They were noble mountains, cut sharp like the edge of the Drakensberg, and crowned

with a line of snow, so that they looked like a sugar-coated cake that had been sliced. Streams came out of the upper snow-wreaths and hurled themselves down the steep — above a shimmering veil of mist, and below a torrent of green water tumbling over pebbles to the sea. The landscape and the weather lulled me into a delectable peace which refused to be disturbed by any “looking before or after,” as some poet says. Newhover was ahead of me — we never lost track of his launch — and it was my business to see what he was up to and to keep myself out of his sight. The ways and means of it I left to fortune to provide.

By and by the light grew dimmer, and the fjord grew narrower, so that dusk fell on us, though, looking back down the inlet, we could see a bright twilight. I assumed that Newhover would go on to Merdal and the fjord’s head, where the Skarso entered the sea, and had decided to stop at Hauge, a village two miles short of it, on the south shore. We came to Hauge about half-past eight, in a wonderful purple dusk, for the place lay right under the shadow of a great cliff. I gave Johan full instructions: he was to wait for me and expect me when I turned up, and to provision himself from the village. On no account must he come up to Merdal, or go out of sight or hail of the boat. He seemed to relish the prospect of a few days’ idleness, for he landed me at a wooden jetty in great good-humour, and wished me sport. What he thought I was after I cannot imagine, for I departed with a rucksack on my back and a stout stick in my hand, which scarcely suggested the chase.

I was in good spirits myself as I stretched my legs on the road which led from Hauge to Merdal. The upper fjord lay black on my left hand, the mountains rose black

on my right, but though I walked in darkness I could see twilight ahead of me, where the hills fell back from the Skarso valley, that wonderful apple-green twilight which even in spring is all the northern night. I had never seen it before, and I suppose something in my blood answered to the place — for my father used to say that the Han-nays came originally from Norse stock. There was a jolly crying of birds from the waters, ducks and geese and oyster-catchers and sandpipers, and now and then would come a great splash as if a salmon were jumping in the brackish tides on his way to the Skarso. I was thinking longingly of my rods left behind, when on turning a corner the lights of Merdal showed ahead, and it seemed to me that I had better be thinking of my next step.

I knew no Norwegian, but I counted on finding natives who could speak English, seeing so many of them have been in England or America. Newhover, I assumed, would go to the one hotel, and it was for me to find lodgings elsewhere. I began to think this spying business might be more difficult than I had thought, for if he saw me he would recognise me, and that must not happen. I was ready, of course, with a story of a walking tour, but he would be certain to suspect, and certain to let Medina know. . . . Well, a lodging for the night was my first business, and I must start inquiries. Presently I came to the little pier of Merdal, which was short of the village itself. There were several men sitting smoking on barrels and coils of rope, and one who stood at the end looking out to where Kristian Egge's boat, which had brought Newhover, lay moored. I turned down the road to it, for it seemed a place to gather information.

I said good evening to the men, and was just about to ask them for advice about quarters, when the man who

had been looking out to sea turned round at the sound of my voice. He seemed an oldish fellow, with rather a stoop in his back, wearing an ancient shooting-jacket. The light was bad, but there was something in the cut of his jib that struck me as familiar, though I couldn't put a name to it.

I spoke to the Norwegians in English, but it was obvious that I had hit on a bunch of indifferent linguists. They shook their heads, and one pointed to the village, as if to tell me that I would be better understood there. Then the man in the shooting-jacket spoke.

"Perhaps I can help," he said. "There is a good inn in Merdal, which at this season is not full."

He spoke excellent English, but it was obvious that he wasn't an Englishman. There was an unmistakable emphasis of the gutturals.

"I doubt the inn may be too good for my purse," I said. "I am on a walking-tour and must lodge cheaply."

He laughed pleasantly. "There may be accommodation elsewhere. Peter Bojer may have a spare bed. I am going that way, sir, and can direct you."

He had turned towards me, and his figure caught the beam of the riding-light of the motor-launch. I saw a thin sunburnt face with a very pleasant expression, and an untidy grizzled beard. Then I knew him, and I could have shouted with amazement at the chance which had brought us two together again.

We walked side by side up the jetty road and on to the highway.

"I think," I said, "that we have met before, Herr Gaudian."

He stopped short. "That is my name . . . but I do not . . . I do not think . . ."

"Do you remember a certain Dutchman called Cornelius Brandt whom you entertained at your country house one night in December '15?"

He looked searchingly in my face.

"I remember," he said. "I also remember a Mr. Richard Hanau, one of Guggenheim's engineers, with whom I talked at Constantinople."

"The same," I said. For a moment I was not clear how he was going to take the revelation, but his next action reassured me, and I saw that I had not been wrong in my estimate of the one German I have ever whole-heartedly liked. He began to laugh, a friendly tolerant laugh.

"*Kritzi Turken!*" he cried. "It is indeed romantic. I have often wondered whether I should see or hear of you again, and behold! you step out of the darkness on a Norwegian fjord."

"You bear no malice?" I said. "I served my country as you served yours. I played fair, as you played fair."

"Malice!" he cried. "But we are gentlemen; also we are not children. I rejoice to see that you have survived the War. I have always wished you well, for you are a very bold and brave man."

"Not a bit of it," I said — "only lucky."

"By what name shall I call you now — Brandt or Hanau?"

"My name is Richard Hannay, but for the present I am calling myself Cornelius Brand — for a reason which I am going to tell you." I had suddenly made up my mind to take Gaudian into my full confidence. He seemed to have been sent by Providence for that purpose, and I was not going to let such a chance slip.

But at my words he stopped short.

"Mr. Hannay," he said, "I do not want your confi-

dence. You are still engaged, I take it, in your country's service? I do not question your motive, but remember I am a German, and I cannot be party to the pursuit of one of my countrymen, however base I may think him."

I could only stare. "But I am not in my country's service," I stammered. "I left it at the Armistice, and I'm a farmer now."

"Do English farmers travel in Norway under false names?"

"That's a private business which I want to explain to you. I assure you there is no German in it. I want to keep an eye on the doings of a fashionable English doctor."

"I must believe you," he said after a pause. "But two hours ago a man arrived in the launch you see anchored out there. He is a fisherman and is now at the inn. That man is known to me — too well known. He is a German, who during the War served Germany in secret ways, in America and elsewhere. I did not love him and I think he did my country grievous ill, but that is a matter for us Germans to settle, and not for foreigners."

"I know your man as Dr. Newhover of Wimpole Street."

"So?" he said. "He has taken again his father's name, which was Neuhofer. We knew him as Kristoffer. What do you want with him?"

"Nothing that any honest German wouldn't approve," and there and then I gave him a sketch of the Medina business. He exclaimed in horror.

"Mr. Hannay," he said hesitatingly, "you are being honest with me?"

"I swear by all that's holy I am telling you the plain truth, and the full truth. Newhover may have done any-

thing you jolly well like in the War. That's all washed out. I'm after him to get a line on a foul business which is English in origin. I want to put a spoke in the wheel of English criminals, and to save innocent lives. Besides, Newhover is only a subordinate. I don't propose to raise a hand against him, only to find out what he is doing."

He held out his hand. "I believe you," he said, "and if I can I will help you."

He conducted me through the long street of the village, past the inn, where I supposed Newhover was now going to bed, and out on to the road which ran up the Skarso valley. We came in sight of the river, a mighty current full of melted snow, sweeping in noble curves through the meadowland in that uncanny dusk. It appeared that he lodged with Peter Bojer, who had a spare bed, and when we reached the cottage, which stood a hundred yards from the highway on the very brink of the stream, Peter was willing to let me have it. His wife gave us supper — an omelette, smoked salmon, and some excellent Norwegian beer — and after it I got out my map and had a survey of the neighbourhood.

Gaudian gave me a grisly picture of the condition of his own country. It seemed that the downfall of the old régime had carried with it the decent wise men like himself, who had opposed its follies, but had lined up with it on patriotic grounds when the War began. He said that Germany was no place for a moderate man, and that the power lay with the bloated industrials, who were piling up fortunes abroad while they were wrecking their country at home. The only opposition, he said, came from the communists, who were half-witted, and the monarchists, who wanted the impossible. "Reason is not listened to, and I fear there is no salvation till my poor people have

passed through the last extremity. You foreign Powers have hastened our destruction, when you had it in your hands to save us. I think you have meant well, but you have been blind, for you have not supported our moderate men and have by your harshness played the game of the wreckers among us."

It appeared that he was very poor now, like all the professional classes. I thought it odd that this man, who had a world-wide reputation as an engineer, couldn't earn a big income in any country he chose. Then I saw that it was because he had lost the wish to make money. He had seen too deep into the vanity of human wishes to have any ambition left. He was unmarried, with no near relations, and he found his pleasure in living simply in remote country places and watching flowers and beasts. He was a keen fisherman, but couldn't afford a good beat, so he leased a few hundred yards from a farmer, who had not enough water to get a proper rent for it, and he did a lot of trout fishing in the tarns high up in the hills and in the Skarso above the foss. As he sat facing me beyond the stove, with his kind sad brown eyes and his rugged face, I thought how like he was to a Scottish moorland shepherd. I had liked him when I first saw him in Stumm's company, but now I liked him so much that because of him I was prepared to think better of the whole German race.

I asked him if he had heard of any other Englishman in the valley — any one of the name of Jason, for instance. He said no; he had been there for three weeks, but the fishing did not begin for another fortnight, and foreign visitors had not yet arrived. Then I asked him about the *saeter* farms, and he said that few of these were open yet, since the high pastures were not ready. One or two on the

lower altitudes might be already inhabited, but not many, though the winter had been a mild one and the spring had come early. "Look at the Skarso," he said. "Usually in April it is quite low, for the snowfields have not begun to melt. But to-day it is as brimming as if it were the middle of May."

He went over the map with me — an inch-to-a-mile one I had got in London — and showed me the lie of the land. The *saeters* were mostly farther up the river, reached by paths up the tributary glens. There was a good road running the length of the valley, but no side roads to connect with the parallel glens, the Uradal and the Bremendal. I found indeed one track marked on the map, which led to the Uradal by a place called Snaasen. "Yes," said Gaudian, "that is the only thing in the way of what you soldiers would call lateral communications. I've walked it, and I'm sorry for the man who tries the road in bad weather. You can see the beginning of the track from this house; it climbs up beside the torrent just across the valley. Snaasen is more or less inhabited all the year round, and I suppose you would call it a kind of *saeter*. It is a sort of shelter hut for travellers taking that road, and in summer it is a paradise for flowers. You would be surprised at the way the natives can cross the hills even in winter. Snaasen belongs to the big farm two miles up stream, which carries with it the best beat on the Skarso. Also there is said to be first-class ryper-shooting later in the year, and an occasional bear. By the way, I rather fancy some one told me that the whole thing was owned by, or had been leased to, an Englishman. . . . You are rich, you see, and you do not leave much in Norway for poor people."

I slept like a log on a bed quite 'as hard as a log, and

woke to a brilliant blue morning, with the birds in the pine-woods fairly riotous, and snipe drumming in the boggy meadows, and the Skarso coming down like a sea. I could see the water almost up to the pathway of a long wooden bridge that led to the big farm Gaudian had spoken of. I got my glass on the torrent opposite, and saw the track to Snaasen winding up beside it till it was lost in a fold of the ravine. Above it I scanned the crown of the ridge, which was there much lower than on the sides of the fjord. There was no snow to be seen, and I knew by a sort of instinct that if I got up there I should find a broad tableland of squelching pastures with old snowdrifts in the hollows and tracts of scrubby dwarf birch.

While I was waiting for breakfast I heard a noise from the highroad, and saw a couple of the little conveyances they call *stolkjaeres* passing. My glass showed me Dr. Newhover in the first and a quantity of luggage in the second. They took the road across the wooden bridge to the big farm, and I could see the splash of their wheels at the far end of it, where the river was over the road. So Dr. Newhover, or some friend of his, was the lessee of this famous fishing, which carried with it the shooting on the uplands behind it. I rather thought I should spend the day finding out more about Snaasen, and I counted myself lucky to have got quarters in such an excellent observation-post as Peter Bojer's cottage.

I wouldn't go near the track to Snaasen till I saw what Newhover did, so Gaudian and I sat patiently at Peter Bojer's window. About ten o'clock a couple of ponies laden with kit in charge of a tow-headed boy appeared at the foot of the track and slowly climbed up the ravine. An hour later came Dr. Newhover, in a suit that looked like khaki, and wearing a long mackintosh cape. He

strode out well and breasted the steep path like a mountaineer. I wanted to go off myself in pursuit of him, keeping well behind, but Gaudian very sensibly pointed out how sparse the cover was, and that if he saw a man on that lonely road he would certainly want to know all about him.

We sat out-of-doors after luncheon in a pleasant glare of sun, and by and by were rewarded by the sight of the pack-ponies returning, laden with a different size and shape of kit. They did not stop at the big farm, but crossed the wooden bridge and took the highroad for Merdal. I concluded that this was the baggage of the man whom Newhover had replaced, and that he was returning to Stavanger in Kristian Egge's boat. About tea-time the man himself appeared — Jason, or whatever his name was. I saw two figures come down the ravine by the Snaasen road, and stop at the foot and exchange farewells. One of them turned to go back, and I saw that this was Newhover, climbing with great strides like a man accustomed to hills. The other crossed the bridge, and passed within hail of us — a foppish young man, my glass told me, wearing smart riding-breeches and with an aquascutum slung over his shoulder.

I was very satisfied with what I had learned. I had seen Newhover relieve his predecessor, just as Medina had planned, and I knew where he was lodged. Whatever his secret was it was hidden in Snaasen, and to Snaasen I would presently go. Gaudian advised me to wait till after supper, when there would be light enough to find the way and not too much to betray us. So we both lay down and slept for four hours, and took the road about ten-thirty as fresh as yearlings.

It was a noble night, windless and mild, and, though

darkness lurked in the thickets and folds of hill, the sky was filled with a translucent amethyst glow. I felt as if I were out on some sporting expedition and enjoyed every moment of the walk with that strung-up expectant enjoyment which one gets in any form of chase. The torrent made wild music on our left hand, grumbling in pits and shooting over ledges with a sound like a snowslip. There was every kind of bird about, but I had to guess at them by their sounds and size, for there was no colour in that shadowy world.

By and by we reached the top and had a light cold wind in our faces blowing from the snowy mountains to the north. The place seemed a huge broken tableland and every hollow glistened as if filled with snow or water. There were big dark shapes ahead of us which I took to be the hills beyond the Uradal. Here it was not so easy to follow the track, which twined about in order to avoid the boggy patches, and Gaudian and I frequently strayed from it and took tosses over snags of juniper. Once I was up against an iron pole, and to my surprise saw wires above. Gaudian nodded. "Snaasen is on the telephone," he said.

I had hoped to see some light in the house, so as to tell it from a distance. But we did not realise its presence till we were close upon it, standing a little back from the path, as dark as a tomb-stone. The inhabitants must have gone early to bed, for there was no sign of life within. It was a two-storeyed erection of wood, stoutly built, with broad eaves to the roof. Adjacent there stood a big barn or hayshed, and behind it some other outbuildings which might have been byres or dairies. We walked stealthily round the place, and were amazed at its utter stillness. There was no sound of an animal moving in the stading, and

when a brace of mallards flew overhead we started at the noise like burglars at the creaking of a board.

Short of burglary there was nothing further to be done, so we took the road home and scrambled at a great pace down the ravine, for it was chilly on the tableland. Before we went to bed, we had settled that next day Gaudian should go up to Snaasen like an ordinary tourist and make some excuse to get inside, while I would take a long tramp over the plateau, keeping well away from the house, in case there might be something ado in that barren region.

Next morning saw the same cloudless weather, and we started off about ten o'clock. I had a glorious but perfectly futile day. I went up the Skarso to well above the foss, and then climbed the north wall of the valley by a gulley choked with brushwood, which gave out long before the top and left me to finish my ascent by way of some very loose screes and unpleasant boiler-plates. I reached the plateau much farther to the east, where it was at a greater altitude, so that I looked down upon the depression where ran the track to Uradal. I struck due north among boggy meadows and the remains of old snow-drifts, through whose fringes flowers were showing, till I was almost on the edge of Uradal, and looked away beyond it to a fine cluster of rock peaks streaked and patched with ice. Uradal glen was so deep cut that I could not see into it, so I moved west and struck the Merdal track well to the north of Snaasen. After that I fetched a circuit behind Snaasen, and had a good view of the house from the distance of about half a mile. Two of its chimneys were smoking, and there were sounds of farm work from the yard. There was no sign of live stock, but it looked as if some one was repairing the sheds against the summer season. I waited for more than an hour, but I

saw no human being, so I turned homeward, and made a careful descent by the ravine, reconnoitring every corner in case I should run into Newhover.

I found that Gaudian had returned before me. When I asked him what luck he had had he shook his head.

"I played the part of a weary traveller, and asked for milk. An ugly woman gave me beer. She said she had no milk, till the cattle came up from the valleys. She would not talk and she was deaf. She said an English Herr had the ryper-shooting, but lived at Tryssil. That is the name of the big farm by the Skarso. She would tell me no more, and I saw no other person. But I observed that Snaasen is larger than I thought. There are rooms built out at the back, which we thought were barns. There is ample space there for a man to be concealed."

I asked him if he had any plan, and he said he thought of going boldly up next day and asking for Newhover, whom he could say he had seen passing Peter Bojer's cottage. He disliked the man, but had never openly quarrelled with him. I approved of that, but in the mean time I resolved to do something on my own account that night. I was getting anxious, for I felt that my time was growing desperately short; it was now the 25th of April and I was due back in London on the 29th, and, if I failed to turn up, Medina would make inquiries at Fosse Manor and suspect. I had made up my mind to go alone that night to Snaasen and do a little pacific burgling.

I set out about eleven, and I put my pistol in my pocket, as well as my flask and sandwiches and electric torch, for it occurred to me that anything might happen. I made good going across the bridge and up the first part of the track, for I wanted to have as much time as possible for my job. My haste was nearly my undoing, for instead of

reconnoitring and keeping my ears open, I strode up the hill as if I had been walking to make a record. It was by the mercy of Heaven that I was at a point where an out-jutting boulder made a sharp corner when I was suddenly aware that some one was coming down the road. I flattened myself into the shadow, and saw Newhover.

He did not see or hear me, for he, too, was preoccupied. He was descending at a good pace, and he must have started in a hurry, for he had no hat. His longish blond locks were all touzled, and his face seemed sharper than usual with anxiety.

I wondered what on earth had happened, and my first notion was to follow him downhill. And then it occurred to me that his absence gave me a sovereign chance at Snaasen. But if the household was astir there might be other travellers on the road and it behoved me to go warily. Now, near the top of the ravine, just under the edge of the tableland, there was a considerable patch of wood — birches, juniper, and wind-blown pines — for there the torrent flowed in a kind of cup, after tumbling off the plateau and before hurling itself down to the valley. Here it was possible to find an alternative road to the path, so I dived in among the matted whortleberries and moss-covered boulders.

I had not gone ten yards before I realised that there was somebody or something else in the thicket. There was a sound of plunging ahead of me, then the crack of a rotten log, then the noise of a falling stone. It might be a beast, but it struck me that no wild thing would move so awkwardly. Only human boots make that kind of clumsy slipping.

If this was somebody from Snaasen what was he doing off the track? Could he be watching me? Well, I pro-

posed to do a little stalking on my own account. I got down on all-fours and crawled in cover in the direction of the sound. It was very dark there, but I could see a faint light where the scrub thinned round the stream.

Soon I was at the edge of the yeasty water. The sounds had stopped, but suddenly they began again a little farther up, and there was a scuffle as if part of the bank had given way. The man, whoever he was, seemed to be trying to cross. That would be a dangerous thing to do, for the torrent was wide and very strong. I crawled a yard or two up-stream, and then in an open patch saw what was happening.

A fallen pine made a crazy bridge to a great rock, from which the rest of the current might conceivably be leaped. A man was kneeling on the trunk and beginning to move along it. . . . But as I looked the rotten thing gave way and the next I saw he was struggling in the foam. It was all the matter of a fraction of a second, and before I knew I was leaning over the brink and clutching at an arm. I gripped it, braced one leg against a rock, and hauled the owner close into the edge out of the main current. He seemed to have taken no hurt, for he found a foothold, and scarcely needed my help to scramble up beside me.

Then to my surprise he went for me tooth and nail. It was like the assault of a wild beast, and its suddenness rolled me on my back. I felt hands on my throat, and grew angry, caught the wrists and wrenched them away. I flung a leg over his back and got uppermost, and after that he was at my mercy. He seemed to realise it, too, for he lay quite quiet and did not struggle.

"What the devil do you mean?" I said angrily. "You'd have been drowned but for me, and then you try to throttle me."

I got out my torch and had a look at him. It was the figure of a slight young man, dressed in rough homespun such as Norwegian farm lads wear. His face was sallow and pinched, and decorated with the most preposterous wispish beard, and his hair was cut roughly as if with garden shears. The eyes that looked up at me were as scared and wild as a deer's.

"What the devil do you mean?" I repeated, and then to my surprise he replied in English.

"Let me up," he said, "I'm too tired to fight. I'll go back with you."

Light broke in on me.

"Don't you worry, old chap," I said soothingly. "You're going back with me, but not to that infernal *saeter*. We've met before, you know. You're Lord Mercot, and I saw you ride 'Red Prince' last year at the 'House' Grind."

He was sitting up, staring at me like a ghost.

"Who are you? Oh, for God's sake, who are you?"

"Hannay's my name. I live at Fosse Manor in the Cotswolds. You once came to dine with us before the Heythrop Ball."

"Hannay!" He repeated stumbly — "I remember — I think — remember — remember Lady Hannay. Yes — and Fosse. It's on the road between —"

He scrambled to his feet.

"Oh, sir, get me away. He's after me — the new devil with the long face, the man who first brought me here. I don't know what has happened to me, but I've been mad a long time, and I've only got sane in the last days. Then I remembered — and I ran away. But they're after me. Oh, quick, quick! Let's hide."

"See here, my lad," I said, and I took out my pistol.

"The first man that lays a hand on you I shoot, and I don't miss. You're as safe now as if you were at home. But this is no place to talk, and I've the devil of a lot to tell you. I'm going to take you down with me to my lodging in the valley. But they're hunting you, so we've got to go cannily. Are you fit to walk? Well, do exactly as I tell you, and in an hour you'll be having a long drink and looking up time-tables."

I consider that journey back a creditable piece of piloting. That poor boy was underfed and shaking with excitement, but he stepped out gallantly, and obeyed me like a lamb. We kept off the track so as to muffle our steps in grass, and took every corner like scouts in a reconnaissance. We met Newhover coming back, but we heard him a long way off and were in good cover when he passed. He was hurrying as furiously as ever and I could hear his laboured breathing. After that we had a safe road over the meadow, but we crossed the bridge most circumspectly, making sure that there was no one in the landscape. About half-past one I pushed open Gaudian's bedroom window, woke him, and begged him to forage for food and drink.

"Did you get into Snaasen?" he asked sleepily.

"No, but I've found what we've been looking for. One of the three hostages is at this moment sitting on your cabin-box."

CHAPTER XII

I RETURN TO SERVITUDE

WE fed Mercot with tinned meats and biscuits and bottled beer, and he ate like a famished schoolboy. The odd thing was that his terror had suddenly left him. I suppose the sight of me, which had linked him up definitely with his past, had made him feel a waif no more, and, once he was quite certain who he was, his natural courage returned. He got great comfort from looking at Gaudian, and indeed I could not imagine a better sedative than a sight of that kind wise old face. I lent him pyjamas, rubbed him down to prevent a chill from his ducking, put him in my bed, and had the satisfaction of seeing him slip off at once into deep slumber.

Next morning Gaudian and I interviewed Peter Bojer and explained that a young English friend of ours had had an accident, while on a walking tour, and might be with us for a day or two. It was not likely that Newhover would advertise his loss, and in any case Peter was no gossip, and Gaudian, who had known him for years, let him see that we wanted the fact of a guest being with us kept as quiet as possible. The boy slept till nearly midday, while I kept a watch on the road. Newhover appeared early, and went down to Merdal village, where he spent the better part of the forenoon. He was probably making inquiries, but they were bound in his own interest to be discreet ones. Then he returned to Tryssil, and later I saw a dejected figure tramping up the Snaasen track. He may have thought that the body of the fugitive was in

some pool of the torrent or being swirled down by the Skarso to the sea, and I imagined that that scarcely fitted in with his instructions.

When Mercot awoke at last and had his breakfast he looked a different lad. His eyes had lost their fright, and though he stuttered badly and seemed to have some trouble in collecting his wits, he had obviously taken hold of himself. His great desire was to get clean, and that took some doing, for he could not have had a bath for weeks. Then he wanted to borrow my razor and shave his beard, but I managed to prevent him in time, for I had been thinking the thing out, and I saw that that would never do. So far as I could see, he had recovered his memory, but there were still gaps in it; that is to say, he remembered all his past perfectly well till he left Oxford on February 17th, and he remembered the events of the last few days, but between the two points he was still hazy.

On returning to his rooms that February evening he had found a note about a horse he was trying to buy, an urgent note asking him to come round at once to certain stables. He had just time for this, before dressing for dinner, so he dashed out of the house — meeting nobody, as it chanced, on the stairs, and, as the night was foggy, being seen by no one in the streets. After that his memory was a blank. He had wakened in a room in London, which he thought was a nursing home, and had seen a doctor — I could picture that doctor — and had gone to sleep again. After that his recollection was like a black night studded with little points of light which were physical sensations. He remembered being very cold and sometimes very tired, he recollected the smell of paraffin, and of mouldy hay, and of a treacly drink which made him sick. He remembered faces, too, a cross old woman who

cursed him, a man who seemed to be always laughing, and whose laugh he feared more than curses. . . .

I suppose that Medina's spell must have been wearing thin during these last days, and that the keeper, Jason, or whoever he was, could not revive it. For Mercot had begun to see Jason no longer as a terror but as an offence — an underbred young bounder whom he detested. And with this clearing of the foreground came a lightening of the background. He saw pictures of his life at Alcester, at first as purely objective things, but soon as in some way connected with himself. Then longing started, passionate longing for something which he knew was his own. . . . It was a short step from that to the realisation that he was Lord Mercot, though he happened to be clad like a tramp and was as dirty as a stoker. And then he proceeded to certain halting deductions. Something bad had happened to him: he was in a foreign land — which land he didn't know: he was being ill-treated and kept prisoner; he must escape and get back to his old happy world. He thought of escape quite blindly, without any plan; if only he could get away from that accursed *saeter*, he would remember better, things would happen to him, things would come back to him.

Then Jason went and Newhover came, and Newhover drove him half crazy with fear, for the doctor's face was in some extraordinary way mixed up with his confused memory of the gaps between the old world and the new. He was mad to escape now, but rather to escape from Newhover than to reach anywhere. He watched for his chance, and found it about eight o'clock the evening before, when the others in the house were at supper. Some instinct had led him toward Merdal. He had heard footsteps behind him and had taken to the thicket. . . . I

appeared, an enemy as he thought, and he had despairingly flung himself on me. Then I had spoken his name, and that fixed the wavering panorama of his memory. He "came to himself" literally, and was now once more the undergraduate of Christ Church, rather shell-shocked and jumpy, but quite sane.

The question which worried me was whether the cure was complete, whether Newhover could act as Medina's deputy and resurrect the spell. I did not believe that he could, but I wasn't certain. Anyhow it had to be risked.

Mercot repeated his request for the loan of my razor. He was smoking a Turkish cigarette as if every whiff took him nearer Elysium. Badly shorn, ill-clad, and bearded as he was, he had still the ghost of the air of the well-to-do, sporting young men. He wanted to know when the steamer sailed, but there seemed no panic now in his impatience.

"Look here," I said. "I don't think you can start just yet. There's a lot I want to tell you now you're able to hear it."

I gave him a rough summary of Macgillivray's story, and the tale of the three hostages. I think he found it comforting to know that there were others in the same hole as himself. "By Jove!" he said, "what a damnable business! And I'm the only one you've got on the track of. No word of the girl and the little boy?"

"No word!"

"Poor devils," he said, but I do not think he really took in the situation.

"So you see how we are placed. Macgillivray's roundup is fixed for the 10th of June. We daren't release the hostages till the 9th, for otherwise the gang would suspect. They have everything ready, as I've told you, for their

own liquidation. Also we can't release one without the others, unless by the 9th of June we have given up hope of the others. Do you see what I mean?"

He didn't. "All I want is to get home in double-quick time," he said.

"I don't wonder. But you must see that that is impossible, unless we chuck in our hand."

He stared at me, and I saw fright beginning to return to his eyes.

"Do you mean that you want me to go back to that bloody place?"

"That's what I mean. If you think it out, you'll see it's the only way. We must do nothing to spoil the chances of the other two. You're a gentleman, and are bound to play the game."

"But I can't," he cried. "Oh, my God, you can't ask me to." There were tears in his voice, and his eyes were wild.

"It's a good deal to ask, but I know you will do it. There's not a scrap of danger now, for you have got back your memory, and you know where you are. It's up to you to play a game with your gaoler. He is the dupe now. You fill the part of the half-witted farm-boy and laugh at him all the time in your sleeve. Herr Gaudian will be waiting down here to keep an eye on you, and when the time is ripe — and it won't be more than five weeks — I give you full permission to do anything you like with Dr. Newhover."

"I can't, I can't," he wailed, and his jaw dropped like a scared child's.

Then Gaudian spoke. "I think we had better leave the subject for the present. Lord Mercot will do precisely what he thinks right. You have sprung the thing on him

too suddenly. I think it might be a good plan if you went for a walk, Hannay. Try the south side of the foss — there's some very pretty scrambling to be had there."

He spoke to me at the door. "The poor boy is all in pieces. You cannot ask him for a difficult decision when his nerves are still raw. Will you leave him with me? I have had some experience in dealing with such cases."

When I got back for supper, after a climb which exercised every muscle in my body, I found Gaudian teaching Mercot a new patience game. We spent a very pleasant evening, and I noticed that Gaudian led the talk to matters in which the boy could share, and made him speak of himself. We heard about his racing ambitions, his desire to ride in the Grand National, his hopes for his polo game. It appeared that he was destined for the Guards, but he was to be allowed a year's travel when he left the 'Varsity, and we planned out an itinerary for him. Gaudian, who had been almost everywhere in the world, told him of places in Asia where no tourist had ever been and where incredible sport was to be had in virgin forest, and I pitched him some yarns about those few districts of Africa which are still unspoiled. He got very keen, for he had a bit of the explorer in him, and asked modestly if we thought he could pull off certain plans we had suggested. We told him there was no doubt about it. "It's not as tough a proposition as riding in the National," I said.

When we had put him to bed, Gaudian smiled as if well pleased. "He has begun to get back his confidence," he said.

He slept for twelve hours, and when he woke I had gone out, for I thought it better to leave him in Gaudian's hands. I had to settle the business that day, for it was now the 27th. I walked down the fjord to Hauge, and

told Johan to be ready to start next morning. I asked him about the weather, which was still cloudless, and he stared at the sky and sniffed, and thought it would hold for a day or two. "But rain is coming," he added, "and wind. The noise of the foss is too loud."

When I returned Gaudian met me at the door. "The boy has recovered," he said. "He will speak to you himself. He is a brave boy and will do a hard task well."

It was a rather shy and self-conscious Mercot that greeted me.

"I'm afraid I behaved rather badly yesterday, sir. I was feeling a bit rattled, and I'm ashamed of myself, for I've always rather fancied my nerve."

"My dear chap," I said, "you've been through enough to crack the nerve of a buffalo."

"I want to say that of course I'll do what you want. I must play the game by the others. That poor little boy! And I remember Miss Victor quite well — I once stayed in the same house with her. I'll go back to the *saeter* when you give the word. Indeed, I'm rather looking forward to it. I promise to play the half-wit so that Dr. Newhover will think me safe in the bag. All I ask is that you let me have my innings with him when the time comes. I've a biggish score to settle."

"Indeed I promise that. Look here, Mercot, if you don't mind my saying it, I think you're behaving uncommonly well. You're a gallant fellow."

"Oh, that's all right," he said, blushing. "When do you want me to start? If it's possible, I'd like another night in a decent bed."

"You shall have it. Early to-morrow morning we'll accompany you to the prison door. You've got to gibber when you see Newhover, and pretend not to be able to

give any account of your doings. I leave you to put up a camouflage. The next five weeks will be infernally dull for you, but you must just shut your teeth and stick it out. Remember, Gaudian will be down here all the time and in touch with your friends, and when the day comes you will take your instructions from him. And, by the way, I'm going to leave you my pistol. I suppose you can keep it concealed, for Newhover is not likely to search your pockets. Don't use it, of course, but it may be a comfort to you to know that you have it."

He took it gladly. "Don't be afraid I'll use it. What I'm keeping for Newhover is the best hiding man ever had. He's a bit above my weight, but I don't mind that."

Very early next morning we woke Mercot, and, while the sky was turning from sapphire to turquoise, took our way through the hazy meadows and up the Snaasen track. We left it at the summit, and fetched a circuit round by the back of the *saeter*, but first we made Mercot roll in the thicket till he had a very grubby face and plenty of twigs and dust in his untidy hair. Then the two of us shook hands with him, found a lair in a patch of juniper, and watched him go forward.

A forlorn figure he looked in that cold half-light as he approached the *saeter* door. But he was acting his part splendidly, for he stumbled with fatigue, dropped heavily against the door, and beat on it feebly. It seemed a long time till it opened, and then he appeared to shrink back in terror. The old woman cried out shrilly to summon some one from within, and presently Newhover came out in a dressing-gown. He caught Mercot by the shoulder and shook him, and that valiant soul behaved exactly like a lunatic, shielding his head and squealing like a rabbit. Finally we saw him dragged indoors. . . . It was horri-

ble to leave him like that, but I comforted myself with the thought of what Newhover would be like in five weeks' time.

We raced back to Peter Bojer's and after a hasty breakfast started off for Hauge. I settled with Gaudian that he was to report any developments to me by cable, and I was to do the same to him. When the day of release was fixed, he was to go boldly up to Snaasen and deal with the doctor as he liked, making sure that he could not communicate with Medina for a day or two. A motor-launch would be waiting at Merdal to take the two to Stavanger, for I wanted him to see Mercot on board the English steamer. I arranged, too, that he should be supplied with adequate funds, for Mercot had not a penny.

We pushed off at once, for I had to be at Flacksholm in good time, and as the morning advanced I did not feel so sure of the weather. What wind we had had these last days had been mild breezes from the west, but now it seemed to be shifting more to the north, and increasing in vehemence. Down in that deep-cut fjord it was calm enough, but up on the crest of the tableland on the northern shore I could see that it was blowing hard, for my glass showed me little *tourmentes* of snow. Also it had suddenly got much colder. I made Johan force the pace, and early in the afternoon we were out of the shelter of the rock walls in the inlet into which the fjord broadened. Here it was blowing fairly hard, and there was a stiff sea running. Flying squalls of rain beat down on us from the north, and for five minutes or so would shut out the view. It was a regular gusty April day, such as you find in spring salmon-fishing in Scotland, and had my job been merely to catch the boat at Stavanger I should not have minded it at all. But there was no time for the boat, for in little

more than twenty-four hours I had to meet Medina. I wondered if Archie Roylance had turned up. I wondered still more how an aeroplane was to make the return journey over these stormy leagues of sea.

Presently the low green lines of Flacksholm showed through the spray, and when Johan began to shape his course to the southwest for Stavanger, I bade him go straight forward and land me on the island. I told him I had a friend who was camping there, and that we were to be picked up in a day or two by an English yacht. Johan obviously thought me mad, but he did as he was told. "There will be no one on the island yet," he said. "The farmer from Rosmaer does not come till June, when the haymaking begins. The winter pasture is poor and sour." That was all to the good, for I did not want any spectator of our madness.

As we drew nearer I could see no sign of life on the low shore, except an infinity of eider ducks, and a fine osprey which sat on a pointed rock like a heraldic griffin. I was watching the bird, for I had only seen an osprey twice before, when Johan steered me into a creek, where there was deep water alongside a flat reef. This, he told me, was the ordinary landing-place from the mainland. I flung my suit-case and rucksack on shore, said good-bye to Johan and tipped him well, and watched the little boat ploughing south till it was hidden by a squall. Then, feeling every kind of a fool, I seized my baggage and proceeded, like Robinson Crusoe, into the interior.

It was raining steadily, a fine thin rain, and every now and then a squall would burst on me and ruffle the sea. Jolly weather for flying, I reflected, especially for flying over some hundreds of miles of ocean! . . . I found the farm, a few rough wooden buildings and a thing like a

stone cattle-pen, but there was no sign of human life there. Then I got out my map, and concluded that I had better make for the centre of the island, where there seemed to be some flat ground at one end of the loch. I was feeling utterly depressed, walking like a bagman with my kit in my hand in an uninhabited Norwegian isle, and due in London the next evening. London seemed about as inaccessible in the time as the moon.

When I got to the rim of the central hollow there was a brief clearing of the weather, and I looked down on a little grey tarn set in very green meadows. In the meadows at the north end I saw to my joy what looked like an aeroplane picketed down, and a thing like a small tent near it. Also I could see smoke curling up from a group of boulders adjoining. The gallant Archie had arrived, and my spirits lightened. I made good going down the hill, and, as I shouted, a figure like an Arctic explorer crawled out of the tent.

"Hullo, Dick," it cried. "Any luck?"

"Plenty," I said. "And you?"

"Famous. Got here last night after a clinkin' journey with the bus behavin' like a lamb. Had an interestin' evenin' with the birds — Lord! such a happy huntin' ground for 'em. I've been doin' sentry-go on the tops all mornin' lookin' for you, but the weather got dirty so I returned to the wigwam. Lunch is nearly ready."

"What about the weather?" I asked anxiously.

"*Pas si bête*," he said, sniffing. "The wind is pretty sure to go down at sunset. D'you mind a night journey?"

Archie's imperturbable good humour cheered me enormously. I must say he was a born campaigner, for he had made himself very snug, and gave me as good a meal as I have ever eaten — a hot stew of tinned stuff and curry, a

plum-pudding, and an assortment of what he called "*delicatessen*." To keep out the cold we drank benedictine in horn mugs. He could talk about nothing but his blessed birds, and announced that he meant to come back to Flacksholm and camp for a week. He had seen a special variety — some kind of phalarope — that fairly ravished his heart. When I asked questions about the journey ahead of us, he scarcely deigned to answer, so busy he was with speculation on the feathered fauna of Norway.

"Archie," I said, "are you sure you can get me across the North Sea?"

"I won't say 'sure.' There's always a lottery in this game, but with any luck we ought to manage it. The wind will die down, and besides it's a ground wind, and may be quiet enough a few hundred feet up. We'll have to shape a compass course anyhow, so that darkness won't worry us."

"What about the machine?" I asked. I don't know why, but I felt horribly nervous.

"A beauty. But of course you never know. If we were driven much out of a straight course, our petrol might run short."

"What would that mean?"

"Forced landin'."

"But supposing we hadn't reached land?"

"Oh, then we'd be in for it," said Archie cheerfully. He added, as if to console me: "We might be picked up by a passin' steamer or a fishin' smack. I've known fellows that had that luck."

"What are the chances of our getting over safely?"

"Evens. Never better or worse than evens in this flyin' business. But it will be all right. Dash it all, a woodcock makes the trip constantly in one flight."

After that I asked no more questions, for I knew I could not get him past the woodcock. I was not feeling happy, but Archie's calm put me to shame. We had a very good tea, and then, sure enough, the wind began to die down, and the clouds opened to show clear sky. It grew perishing cold, and I was glad of every stitch of clothing, and envied Archie his heavy skin coat. We were all ready about nine, and in a dead calm cast loose, taxied over a stretch of turf, rose above the loch so as to clear the hill, and turned our faces to the west, which was like a shell of gold closing down upon the molten gold of the sea.

Luck was with us that night, and all my qualms were belied. Apart from the cold, which was savage, I enjoyed every moment of the trip, till in the early dawn we saw a crawling black line beneath us which was the coast of Aberdeen. We filled up with petrol at a place in Kincardine, and had an enormous breakfast at the local hotel. Everything went smoothly and it was still early in the day when I found we were crossing the Cheviots. We landed at York about noon, and, while Archie caught the London train, I got my car from the garage and started for Oxford. But first I wired to Mary asking her to wire to Medina in my name that I would reach London by the 7.15. I had a pleasant run south, left the car at Oxford, and duly emerged on the platform at Paddington to find Medina waiting for me.

His manner was almost tender.

"My dear fellow, I do hope you are better?"

"Perfectly fit again, thank you. Ready for anything."

"You look more sunburnt than when you left town."

"It's the wonderful weather we've had. I've been lying basking on the verandah."

CHAPTER XIII

I VISIT THE FIELDS OF EDEN

THERE was a change in Medina. I noticed it the following day when I lunched with him, and very particularly at the next dinner of the Thursday Club to which I went as his guest. It was a small change, which nobody else would have remarked, but to me, who was watching him like a lynx, it was clear enough. His ease of manner towards the world was a little less perfect, and when we were alone he was more silent than before. I did not think that he had begun to suspect any danger to his plans, but the day for their consummation was approaching, and even his cold assurance may have been flawed by little quivers of nervousness. As I saw it, once the big liquidation took place and he realised the assets which were to be the foundation of his main career, it mattered little what became of the hostages. He might let them go; they would wander back to their old world unable to give any account of their absence, and, if the story got out, there would be articles in the medical journals about these unprecedented cases of lost memory. So far I was certain that they had taken no lasting harm. But if the liquidation failed, God knew what their fate would be. They would never be seen again, for if his possession of them failed to avert disaster to his plans, he would play for safety, and, above all, for revenge. Revenge to a mind like his would be a consuming passion.

The fact that I had solved one conundrum and laid my hand on one of the hostages put me in a perfect fever of

restlessness. Our time was very short, and there were still two poor souls hidden in his black underworld. It was the little boy I thought most of, and perhaps my preoccupation with him made me stupid about other things. My thoughts were always on the Blind Spinner, and there I could not advance one single inch. Macgillivray's watchers had nothing to report. It was no use my paying another visit to Madame Breda, and going through the same rigmarole. I could only stick to Medina and pray for luck. I had resolved that if he asked me again to take up my quarters with him in Hill Street I would accept, though it might be hideously awkward in a score of ways.

I longed for Sandy, but no word came from him, and I had his strict injunctions not to try to reach him. The only friend I saw in those early days of May was Archie Roylance, who seemed to have forgotten his Scotch green-shanks and settled down in London for the season. He started playing polo, which was not a safe game for a man with a crooked leg, and he opened his house in Grosvenor Street and roosted in a corner of it. He knew I was busy in a big game, and he was mad to be given a share in it, but I had to be very careful with Archie. He was the best fellow alive, but discretion had never been his strong point. So I refused to tell him anything at present, and I warned Turpin, who was an ancient friend of his, to do the same. The three of us dined together one night, and poor old Turpin was rallied by Archie on his glumness.

"You're a doleful bird, you know," he told him. "I heard somewhere you were goin' to be married and I expect that's the cause. What do you call it — *ranger* yourself? Cheer up, my son. It can't be as bad as it sounds. Look at Dick there."

I switched him on to other subjects, and we got his

opinion on the modern stage. Archie had been doing a course of plays, and had very strong views on the drama. Something had got to happen, he said, or he fell asleep in the first act, and something very rarely happened, so he was left to slumber peacefully till he was awakened and turned out by the attendants. He liked plays with shooting in them, and knockabout farce — anything indeed with a noise in it. But he had struck a vein of serious drama which he had found soporific. One piece in especial, which showed the difficulties of a lady of fifty who fell in love with her stepson, he seriously reprobated.

“Rotten,” he complained. “What did it matter to any one what the old cat did? But I assure you, everybody round me was gloatin’ over it. A fellow said to me it was a masterpiece of tragic irony. What’s irony, Dick? I thought it was the tone your commandin’ officer adopted, when you had made an ass of yourself, and he showed it by complimentin’ you on your intelligence. . . . Oh, by the way, you remember the girl in green we saw at that dancin’ place? Well, I saw her at the show — at least I’m pretty sure it was her — in a box with the black-bearded fellow. She didn’t seem to be takin’ much of it in. Wonder who she is and what she was doin’ there. Russian, d’you think? I believe the silly play was translated from the Russian. I want to see that girl dance again.”

The next week was absolutely blank, except for my own perpetual worrying. Medina kept me close to him, and I had to relinquish any idea of going down to Fosse for an occasional night. I longed badly for the place and for a sight of Peter John, and Mary’s letters didn’t comfort me, for they were getting scrappier and scrappier. My hope was that Medina would act on Kharáma’s advice, and in order to establish his power over his victims

bring them into the open and exercise it in the environment to which they had been accustomed. That wouldn't help me with the little boy, but it might give me a line on Miss Victor. I rather hoped that at some ball I would see him insisting on some strange woman dancing with him, or telling her to go home, or something, and then I would have cause to suspect. But no such luck. He never spoke to a woman in my presence who wasn't somebody perfectly well known. I began to think that he had rejected the Indian's advice as too dangerous.

Kharáma, more by token, was back in town, and Medina took me to see him again. The fellow had left Claridge's and was living in a little house in Eaton Place, and away from the glitter of a big hotel he looked even more sinister and damnable. We went there one evening after dinner, and found him squatting on the usual couch in a room lit by one lamp and fairly stinking with odd scents. He seemed to have shed his occidental dress, for he wore flowing robes, and I could see his beastly bare feet under the skirts of them, when he moved to rearrange a curtain.

They took no more notice of me than if I had been a grandfather's clock, and to my disgust they conducted the whole conversation in some Eastern tongue. I gathered nothing from it, except a deduction as to Medina's state of mind. There was an unmistakable hint of nervousness in his voice. He seemed to be asking urgent questions, and the Indian was replying calmly and soothingly. By and by Medina's voice became quieter, and suddenly I realised that the two were speaking of me. Kharáma's heavy eyes were raised for a second in my direction, and Medina turned ever so little towards me. The Indian asked some question about me, and Medina

replied carelessly with a shrug of his shoulders and a slight laugh. That laugh rasped my temper. He was evidently saying that I was packed up and sealed and safe on the shelf.

That visit didn't make me feel happier, and next day, when I had a holiday from Medina's company, I had nothing better to do than to wander about London and think dismal thoughts. Yet, as luck would have it, that aimless walk had its consequences. It was a Sunday, and on the edge of Battersea Park I encountered a forlorn little company of Salvationists conducting a service in the rain. I stopped to listen — I always do — for I am the eternal average man who is bound to halt at every street show, whether it be a motor accident or a Punch and Judy. I listened to the tail-end of an address from a fat man who looked like a reformed publican, and a few words from an earnest lady in spectacles. Then they sang a hymn to a trombone accompaniment, and lo and behold, it was my old friend, which I had last whistled in Tom Greenslade's bedroom at Fosse. "There is rest for the weary," they sang:

"On the other side of Jordan
In the green fields of Eden,
Where the Tree of Life is blooming,
There is rest for you."

I joined heartily in the singing, and contributed two half-crowns to the collecting box, for somehow the thing seemed to be a good omen.

I had been rather neglecting that item in the puzzle, and that evening and during the night I kept turning it over till my brain was nearly addled.

"Where the sower casts his seed in
Furrows of the fields of Eden,"

That was the version in the rhyme, and in Tom Green-slade's recollection the equivalent was a curiosity shop in North London kept by a Jew with a dyed beard. Surely the two must correspond, though I couldn't just see how. The other two items had panned out so well that it was reasonable to suppose that the third might do the same. I could see no light, and I finally dropped off to sleep with that blessed "fields of Eden" twittering about my head.

I awoke with the same obsession, but other phrases had added themselves to it. One was the "playing-fields of Eton," about which some fellow had said something, and for a moment I wondered if I hadn't got hold of the right trail. Eton was a school for which Peter John's name was down, and therefore it had to do with boys, and might have to do with David Warcliff. But after breakfast I gave up that line, for it led nowhere. The word was "Eden," to rhyme with "seed in." There were other fields haunting me — names like Tothill Fields and Bunhill Fields. These were places in London, and that was what I wanted. The Directory showed no name like that of "Fields of Eden," but was it not possible that there had once in old days been a place called by that odd title?

I spent the morning in the Club Library, which was a very good one, reading up Old London. I read all about Vauxhall Gardens and Ranelagh and Cremorne, and a dozen other ancient haunts of pleasure, but I found nothing to my purpose. Then I remembered that Bullivant — Lord Artinswell — had had for one of his hobbies the study of bygone London, so I telephoned to him and invited myself to lunch.

He was very pleased to see me, and it somehow comforted me to find myself again in the house in Queen

Anne's Gate where I had spent some of the most critical moments of my life.

"You've taken on the work I wrote to you about," he said. "I knew you would. How are you getting on?"

"So-so. It's a big job and there's very little time. I want to ask you a question. You're an authority on Old London. Tell me, did you ever come across in your researches the name of the 'Fields of Eden'?"

He shook his head. "Not that I remember. What part of London?"

"I fancy it would be somewhere north of Oxford Street."

He considered. "No. What is your idea? A name of some private gardens or place of amusement?"

"Yes. Just like Cremorne or Vauxhall."

"I don't think so, but we'll look it up. I've a good collection of old maps and plans, and some antique directories."

So after luncheon we repaired to his library and set to work. The maps showed nothing, nor did the books at first. We were searching too far back, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when you went fox-hunting in what is now Regent's Park and Tyburn gallows stood near the Marble Arch. Then, by sheer luck, I tried a cast nearer our own time, and found a ribald work belonging to about the date of the American War, which purported to be a countryman's guide to the amusements of town. There was all sorts of information about "Cider Cellars" and "Groves of Harmony," which must have been pretty low pubs, and places in the suburbs for cock-fighting and dog-fighting. I turned up the index, and there to my joy I saw the word "Eden."

I read the passage aloud, and I believe my hands were

shaking. The place was, as I hoped, north of Oxford Street in what we now call Marylebone. "The Fields of Eden," said the book, "were opened by Mr. Askew as a summer resort for the gentlemen and sportsmen of the capital. There of a fine afternoon may be seen Lord A—— and the Duke of B—— roving among the shady, if miniature, groves, not unaccompanied by the fair nymphs of the garden, while from adjacent arbours come the cheerful tinkle of glasses and the merry clatter of dice, and the harmonious strains of Signora F——'s Italian choir." There was a good deal more of it, but I stopped reading. There was a plan of London in the book, and from it I was able to plot out the boundaries of that doubtful paradise.

Then I got a modern map, and fixed the location on it. The place had been quite small, only a few acres, and to-day it was covered by the block defined by Wellesley Street; Apwith Lane, Little Fardell Street, and the mews behind Royston Square. I wrote this down in my notebook and took my leave.

"You look pleased, Dick. Have you found what you want? Curious that I never heard the name, but it seems to have belonged to the dullest part of London at the dullest period of its history." Lord Artinswell, I could see, was a little nettled, for your antiquary hates to be caught out in his own subject.

I spent the rest of the afternoon making a very thorough examination of a not very interesting neighbourhood. What I wanted was a curiosity shop, and at first I thought I was going to fail. Apwith Lane was a kind of slum, with no shops but a disreputable foreign chemist's and a small dirty confectioner's, round the door of which dirty little children played. The inhabitants seemed to be chiefly foreigners. The mews at the back of Royston

Square were of course useless; it was long since dwellers in that square had kept carriages, and they seemed to be occupied chiefly with the motor vans of a steam laundry and the lorries of a coal merchant. Wellesley Street, at least the part of it in my area, was entirely occupied with the show-rooms of various American automobile companies. Little Fardell Street was a curious place. It had one odd building which may have been there when the Fields of Eden flourished, and which now seemed to be a furniture repository of a sort, with most of the windows shuttered. The other houses were perhaps forty years old, most of them the offices of small wholesale businesses, such as you find in back streets in the City. There was one big French baker's shop at the corner, a picture-framer's, a watch-maker's, and a small and obviously decaying optician's. I walked down the place twice, and my heart sank, for I could see nothing in the least resembling an antique-shop.

I patrolled the street once more, and then I observed that the old dwelling, which looked like a furniture depository, was also some kind of shop. Through a dirty lower window I caught a glimpse of what seemed to be Persian rugs and the bland face of a soap-stone idol. The door had the air of never having been used, but I tried it and it opened, tinkling a bell far in the back premises. I found myself in a small dusty place, littered up like a lumber room with boxes and carpets and rugs and bric-à-brac. Most of the things were clearly antiques, though to my inexpert eye they didn't look worth much. The Turcoman rugs, especially, were the kind of thing you can buy anywhere in the Levant by the dozen.

A dishevelled Jewess confronted me, wearing sham diamond earrings.

"I'm interested in antiques," I said pleasantly, taking off my hat to her. "May I look round?"

"We do not sell to private customers," she said. "Only to the trade."

"I'm sorry to hear that. But may I look round? If I fancied something, I dare say I could get some dealer I know to offer for it."

She made no answer, but fingered her earrings with her plump grubby hands.

I turned over some of the rugs and carpets, and my first impression was confirmed. They were mostly trash, and a lacquer cabinet I uncovered was a shameless fake.

"I like that," I said, pointing to a piece of Persian embroidery. "Can't you put a price on it for me?"

"We only sell to the trade," she repeated, as if it were a litany. Her beady eyes, which never left my face, were entirely without expression.

"I expect you have a lot of things upstairs," I said. "Do you think I might have a look at them? I'm only in London for the day, and I might see something I badly wanted. I quite understand that you are wholesale people, but I can arrange any purchase through a dealer. You see, I'm furnishing a country house."

For the first time her face showed a certain life. She shook her head vigorously. "We have no more stock at present. We do not keep a large stock. Things come in and go out every day. We only sell to the trade."

"Well, I'm sorry to have taken up your time. Good afternoon." As I left the shop, I felt that I had made an important discovery. The business was bogus. There was very little that any dealer would touch, and the profits from all the trade done would not keep the proprietor in Virginian cigarettes.

I paid another visit to the neighbourhood after dinner. The only sign of life was in the slums of Apwith Lane, where frowsy women were chattering on the kerb. Wellesley Street was shuttered and silent from end to end. So was Little Fardell Street. Not a soul was about in it, not a ray of light was seen at any window; in the midst of the din of London it made a little enclave like a graveyard. I stopped at the curiosity shop, and saw that the windows were heavily shuttered and that the flimsy old door was secured by a strong outer frame of iron which fitted into a groove at the edge of the pavement and carried a stout lock. The shutters on the ground-floor windows were substantial things, preposterously substantial for so worthless a show. As I looked at them I had a strong feeling that the house behind that palisade was not as dead as it looked, that somewhere inside it there was life, and that in the night things happened there which it concerned me tremendously to know.

Next morning I went to see Macgillivray.

"Can you lend me a first-class burglar?" I asked. "Only for one night. Some fellow who won't ask any questions and will hold his tongue."

"I've given up being surprised when you're about," he said. "No. We don't keep tame burglars here, but I can find you a man who knows rather more about the art than any professional. Why?"

"Simply because I want to get inside a certain house to-night, and I see no chance of doing it except by breaking my way in. I suppose you could so arrange it that the neighbouring policemen would not interfere. In fact I want them to help to keep the coast clear."

I went into details with him, and showed him the lie of the land. He suggested trying the back of the house, but

I had reconnoitred that side and seen that it was impossible, for the building seemed to join on with the houses in the street behind. In fact there was no back door. The whole architecture was extremely odd, and I had a notion that the entrance in Little Fardell Street might itself be a back door. I told Macgillivray that I wanted an expert who could let me in by one of the ground-floor windows, and replace everything so that there should be no trace next morning. He rang a bell and asked for Mr. Abel to be sent for. Mr. Abel was summoned, and presently appeared, a small wizened man, like a country tradesman. Macgillivray explained what was required of him, and Mr. Abel nodded. It was a job which offered no difficulties, he said, to an experienced man. He would suggest that he investigate the place immediately after closing time, and begin work about ten o'clock. If I arrived at ten-thirty, he promised to have a means of entrance prepared. He inquired as to who were the constables at the nearest points, and asked that certain special ones should be put on duty, with whom he could arrange matters. I never saw any one approach what seemed to me to be a delicate job with such businesslike assurance.

"Do you want any one to accompany you inside?" Macgillivray asked.

I said no. I thought I had better explore the place alone, but I wanted somebody within call in case there was trouble, and of course if I didn't come back, say within two hours, he had better come and look for me.

"We may have to arrest you as a housebreaker," he said. "How are you going to explain your presence if there's nothing wrong indoors and you disturb the sleep of a respectable caretaker?"

"I must take my chance," I said. I didn't feel nervous

about that point. The place would either be empty, or occupied by those who would not invite the aid of the police.

After dinner I changed into an old tweed suit and rubber-soled shoes, and as I sat in the taxi I began to think that I had entered too lightly on the evening's business. How was that little man Abel to prepare an entrance without alarming the neighbourhood, even with the connivance of the police; and if I found somebody inside what on earth was I to say? There was no possible story to account for a clandestine entry into anybody else's house, and I had suddenly a vision of the earringed Jewess screeching in the night and my departure for the cells in the midst of a crowd of hooligans from Apwith Lane. Even if I found something very shady indoors it would only be shady to my own mind in connection with my own problem, and would be all right in the eyes of the law. I was not likely to hit on anything patently criminal, and, even if I did, how was I to explain my presence there? I suffered from a bad attack of cold feet, and would have chucked the business there and then but for that queer feeling at the back of my head that it was my duty to risk it — that if I turned back I should be missing something of tremendous importance. But I can tell you I was feeling far from happy when I dismissed the taxi at the corner of Royston Square, and turned into Little Fardell Street.

It was a dark cloudy evening, threatening rain, and the place was none too brilliantly lit. But to my disgust I saw opposite the door of the curiosity shop a brazier of hot coals and the absurd little shelter which means that part of the street is up. There was the usual roped-in enclosure, decorated with red lamps, a heap of débris, and a

hole where some of the setts had been lifted. Here was bad luck with a vengeance, that the Borough Council should have chosen this place and moment of all others for investigating the drains. And yet I had a kind of shamefaced feeling of relief, for this put the lid on my enterprise. I wondered why Macgillivray had not contrived the thing better.

I found I had done him an injustice. It was the decorous face of Mr. Abel which regarded me out of the dingy pent-house.

"This seemed to me the best plan, sir," he said respectfully. "It enables me to wait for you here without exciting curiosity. I've seen the men on point duty, and it is all right in that quarter. This street is quiet enough, and taxis don't use it as a short cut. You'll find the door open. The windows might have been difficult, but I had a look at the door first, and that big iron frame is a piece of bluff. The bolt of the lock runs into the side-bar of the frame, but the frame itself is secured to the wall by another much smaller lock which you can only detect by looking closely. I have opened that for you — quite easily done."

"But the other door — the shop-door — that rings a bell inside."

"I found it unlocked," he said, with the ghost of a grin. "Whoever uses this place after closing hours doesn't want to make much noise. The bell is disconnected. You have only to push it open and walk in."

Events were forcing me against all my inclinations to go forward.

"If any one enters when I am inside? . . ." I began.

"You will hear the sound and must take measures accordingly. On the whole, sir, I am inclined to think that there's something wrong with the place. You are armed?"

No. That is as well. Your position is unauthorised, as one would say, and arms might be compromising."

"If you hear me cry?"

"I will come to your help. If you do not return within — shall we say? — two hours, I will make an entrance along with the nearest constable. The unlocked door will give us a pretext."

"And if I come out in a hurry?"

"I have thought of that. If you have a fair start there is room for you to hide here," and he jerked his thumb towards the pent-house. "If you are hard-pressed I will manage to impede the pursuit."

The little man's calm matter-of-factness put me on my mettle. I made sure that the street was empty, opened the iron frame, and pushed through the shop-door, closing it softly behind me.

The shop was as dark as the inside of a nut, not a crack of light coming through the closely-shuttered windows. I felt very eerie, as I tiptoed cautiously among the rugs and tables. I listened, but there was no sound of any kind either from within or without, so I switched on my electric torch and waited breathlessly. Still no sound or movement. The conviction grew upon me that the house was uninhabited, and with a little more confidence I started out to explore.

The place did not extend far to the back, as I had believed. Very soon I came upon a dead wall against which every kind of litter was stacked, and that way progress was stopped. The door by which the Jewess had entered lay to the right, and that led me into a little place like a kitchen, with a sink, a cupboard or two, a gas-fire, and in the corner a bed — the kind of lair which a caretaker occupies in a house to let. I made out a window rather high

up in the wall, but I could discover no other entrance save that by which I had come. So I returned to the shop and tried the passage to the left.

Here at first I found nothing but locked doors, obviously cupboards. But there was one open, and my torch showed me that it contained a very steep flight of stairs — the kind of thing that in old houses leads to the attics. I tried the boards, for I feared that they would creak, and I discovered that all the treads had been renewed. I can't say I liked diving into that box, but there was nothing else for it unless I were to give up.

At the top I found a door, and I was just about to try to open it when I heard steps on the other side.

I stood rigid in that narrow place, wondering what was to happen next. The man — it was a man's foot — came up to the door and to my consternation turned the handle. Had he opened it I would have been discovered, for he had a light, and Lord knows what mix-up would have followed. But he didn't; he tried the handle and then turned a key in the lock. After that I heard him move away.

This was fairly discouraging, for it appeared that I was now shut off from the rest of the house. When I had waited for a minute or two for the coast to clear, I too tried the handle, expecting to find it fast. To my surprise the door opened; the man had not locked, but unlocked it. This could mean only one of two things. Either he intended himself to go out by this way later, or he expected some one and wanted to let him in.

From that moment I recovered my composure. My interest was excited, there was a game to play and something to be done. I looked round the passage in which I found myself and saw the explanation of the architecture

which had puzzled me. The old building in Little Fardell Street was the merest slip, only a room thick, and it was plastered against a much more substantial and much newer structure in which I now found myself. The passage was high and broad, and heavily carpeted, and I saw electric fittings at each end. This alarmed me, for if any one came along and switched on the light, there was not cover to hide a cockroach. I considered that the boldest plan would be the safest, so I tiptoed to the end, and saw another passage equally bare going off at right angles. This was no good, so I brazenly assaulted the door of the nearest room. Thank Heaven! it was empty, so I could have a reconnoitring base.

It was a bedroom, well furnished in the Waring & Gil-low style, and to my horror I observed that it was a woman's bedroom. It was a woman's dressing-table I saw, with big hair-brushes and oddments of scents and powders. There was a wardrobe with the door ajar full of hanging dresses. The occupant had been there quite lately, for wraps had been flung on the bed and a pair of slippers lay by the dressing-table, as if they had been kicked off hurriedly.

The place put me into the most abject fright. I seemed to have burgled a respectable flat and landed in a lady's bedroom, and I looked forward to some appalling scandal which would never be hushed up. Little Abel roosting in his pent-house seemed a haven of refuge separated from me by leagues of obstacles. I reckoned I had better get back to him as soon as possible, and I was just starting, when that happened which made me stop short. I had left the room door ajar when I entered, and of course I had switched off my torch after my first lock round. I had been in utter darkness, but now I saw a light in the passage.

It might be the confounded woman who owned the bedroom, and my heart went into my boots. Then I saw that the passage light had not been turned on, and that whoever was there had a torch like me. The footsteps were coming by the road I had come myself. Could it be the man for whom the staircase door had been unlocked?

It was a man all right, and, whatever his errand, it was not with my room. I watched him through the crack left by the door, and saw his figure pass. It was some one in a hurry who walked swiftly and quietly, and, beyond the fact that he wore a dark coat with the collar turned up and a black soft hat, I could make out nothing. The figure went down the corridor and at the end seemed to hesitate. Then it turned into a room on the left and disappeared.

There was nothing to do but wait, and happily I had not to wait long, for I was becoming pretty nervous. The figure reappeared, carrying something in its hand, and as it came towards me I had a glimpse of its face. I recognised it at once as that of the grey melancholy man whom I had seen the first night in Medina's house, when I was coming out of my stupor. For some reason or another that face had become stamped on my memory, and I had been waiting to see it again. It was sad, forlorn, and yet in a curious way pleasant; anyhow there was nothing repellent in it. But he came from Medina, and at that thought every scrap of hesitation and funk fled from me. I had been right in my instinct; this place was Medina's, it was the Fields of Eden of the rhyme. A second ago I had felt a futile blunderer; now I was triumphant.

He passed my door and turned down the passage which ran at right angles. I stepped after him and saw the light halt at the staircase door, and then disappear. My first

impulse was to follow, tackle him in the shop, and get the truth out of him, but I at once discarded that notion, which would have given the whole show away. My business was to make further discoveries. I must visit the room which had been the object of his visit.

I was thankful to be out of that bedroom. In the passage I listened, but could hear no sound anywhere. There was indeed a sound in the air, but it appeared to come from the outer world, a sound like an organ or an orchestra a long way off. I concluded that there must be a church somewhere near where the choir-boys were practising.

The room I entered was a very queer place. It looked partly like a museum, partly like an office, and partly like a library. The curiosity shop had been full of rubbish, but I could see at a glance that there was no rubbish here. There were some fine Italian plaques — I knew something about these, for Mary collected them — and a set of green Chinese jars which looked the real thing. Also, there was a picture which seemed good enough to be a Hobbema. For the rest there were several safes of a most substantial make; but there were no papers lying about, and every drawer of a big writing-table was locked. I had not the wherewithal to burgle the safes and the table, even if I had wanted to. I was certain that most valuable information lurked somewhere in that place, but I did not see how I could get at it.

I was just about to leave, when I realised that the sound of music which I had heard in the passage was much louder here. It was no choir-boys' practising, but strictly secular music, apparently fiddles and drums, and the rhythm suggested a dance. Could this odd building abut on a dance-hall? I looked at my watch and saw that

it was scarcely eleven and that I had only been some twenty minutes indoors. I was now in a mood of almost foolhardy confidence, so I determined to do a little more research.

The music seemed to come from somewhere to the left. The windows of the room, so far as I could judge, must look into Wellesley Street, which showed me how I had misjudged that thoroughfare. There might be a dancing-hall tucked in among the automobile shops. Anyhow I wanted to see what lay beyond this room, for there must be an entrance to it other than by the curiosity shop. Sure enough I found a door between two bookcases covered with a heavy *portière*, and emerged into still another passage.

Here the music sounded louder, and I seemed to be in a place like those warrens behind the stage in a theatre, where rooms are of all kinds of shapes and sizes. The door at the end was locked, and another door which I opened gave on a flight of wooden steps. I did not want to descend just yet, so I tried another door, and then shut it softly. For the room it opened upon was lighted, and I had the impression of human beings not very far off. Also the music, as I opened the door, came out in a great swelling volume of sound.

I stood for a moment hesitating, and then I opened that door again. For I had a notion that the light within did not come from anything in the room. I found myself in a little empty chamber, dusty and cheerless, like one of those cubby-holes you see in the Strand, where the big plate-glass front window reaches higher than the shop, and there is a space between the ceiling and the next floor. All one side was of glass, in which a casement was half open, and through the glass came the glare of a hun-

dred lights from somewhere beyond. Very gingerly I moved forward, till I could look down on what was happening below.

For the last few seconds I think I had known what I was going to see. It was the dancing-club which I had visited some weeks before with Archie Roylance. There were the sham Chinese decorations, the blaze of lights, the nigger band, the whole garish spectacle. Only the place was far more crowded than on my previous visit. The babble of laughter and talk which rose from it added a further discord to the ugly music, but there was a fierce raucous gaiety about it all, an overpowering sense of something which might be vulgar but was also alive and ardent. Round the skirts of the hall was the usual *rastagouère* crowd of men and women drinking liqueurs and champagne, and mixed with fat Jews and blue-black dagos the flushed faces of boys from barracks or college who imagined they were seeing life. I thought for a moment that I saw Archie, but it was only one of Archie's kind, whose lean red visage made a queer contrast with the dead white of the woman he sat by.

The dancing was madder and livelier than on the last occasion. There was more vigour in the marionettes, and I was bound to confess that they knew their trade, little as I valued it. All the couples were expert, and when now and then a bungler barged in he did not stay long. I saw no sign of the girl in green whom Archie had admired, but there were plenty like her. It was the men I most disliked, pallid skeletons or puffy Latins, whose clothes fitted them too well, and who were sometimes as heavily made-up as the women.

One especially I singled out for violent disapproval. He was a tall young man, with a waist like a wasp, a white

face, and hollow drugged eyes. His lips were red like a chorus-girl's, and I would have sworn that his cheeks were rouged. Anyhow he was a loathsome sight. But ye gods! he could dance. There was no sign of animation in him, so that he might have been a corpse, galvanised by some infernal power and compelled to move through an everlasting dance of death. I noticed that his heavy eyelids were never raised.

Suddenly I got a bad shock. For I realised that this mannequin was no other than my ancient friend, the Marquis de la Tour du Pin.

I hadn't recovered from that when I got a worse. He was dancing with a woman whose hair seemed too bright to be natural. At first I could not see her face clearly, for it was flattened against his chest, but she seemed to be hideously and sparsely dressed. She too knew how to dance, and the slim grace of her body was conspicuous even in her vulgar clothes. Then she turned her face to me, and I could see the vivid lips and the weary old pink and white enamel of her class. Pretty, too . . .

And then I had a shock which nearly sent me through the window. For in this painted dancer I recognised the wife of my bosom and the mother of Peter John.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR ARCHIBALD ROYLANCE PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT

THREE minutes later I was back in the curiosity shop. I switched off my light, and very gently opened the street door. There was a sound of footsteps on the pavement, so I drew back till they had passed. Then I emerged into the quiet street, with Abel's little brazier glowing in front of me, and Abel's little sharp face poked out of his pent-house.

"All right, sir?" he asked cheerfully.

"All right," I said. "I have found what I wanted."

"There was a party turned up not long after you had gone in. Lucky I had locked the door after you. He wasn't inside more than five minutes. A party with a black top-coat turned up at the collar — respectable party he looked — oldish — might have been a curate. Funny thing, sir, but I guessed correctly when you were coming back, and had the door unlocked ready for you. . . . If you've done with me I'll clear off."

"Can you manage alone?" I asked. "There's a good deal to tidy up."

He winked solemnly. "In an hour there won't be a sign of anything. I have my little ways of doing things. Good night, sir, and thank you." He was like a boots seeing a guest off from an hotel.

I found that the time was just after half-past eleven, so I walked to Tottenham Court Road and picked up a taxi, telling the man to drive to Great Charles Street in Westminster. Mary was in London, and I must see her at

once. She had chosen to take a hand in the game, probably at Sandy's instigation, and I must find out what exactly she was doing. The business was difficult enough already with Sandy following his own trail and me forbidden to get into touch with him, but if Mary was also on the job it would be naked chaos unless I knew her plans. I own I felt miserably nervous. There was nobody in the world whose wisdom I put higher than hers and I would have trusted her to the other side of Tophet, but I hated to think of a woman mixed up in something so ugly and perilous. She was far too young and lovely to be safe on the back stairs. And yet I remembered that she had been in uglier affairs before this and I recalled old Blenkinsiron's words: "She can't scare and she can't soil." And then I began to get a sort of comfort from the feeling that she was along with me in the game; it made me feel less lonely. But it was pretty rough luck on Peter John. Anyhow I must see her, and I argued that she would probably be staying with her Wymondham aunts, and that in any case I could get news of her there.

The Misses Wymondham were silly ladies, but their butler would have made Montmartre respectable. He and I had always got on well, and I think the only thing that consoled him when Fosse was sold was that Mary and I were to have it. The house in Great Charles Street was one of those tremendously artistic new dwellings with which the intellectual plutocracy have adorned the Westminster slums.

"Is her ladyship home yet?" I asked.

"No, Sir Richard, but she said she wouldn't be late. I expect her any moment."

"Then I think I'll come in and wait. How are you, Barnard? Found your city legs yet?"

"I am improving, Sir Richard, I thank you. Very pleased to have Miss Mary here, if I may take the liberty of so speaking of her. Miss Claire is in Paris still, and Miss Wymondham is dancing to-night, and won't be back till very late. How are things at Fosse, sir, if I may make so bold? And how is the young gentleman? Miss Mary has shown me his photograph. A very handsome young gentleman, sir, and favours yourself."

"Nonsense, Barnard. He's the living image of his mother. Get me a drink, like a good fellow. A tankard of beer, if you have it, for I've a throat like a grindstone."

I drank the beer and waited in a little room which would have been charming but for the garish colour scheme which Mary's aunts had on the brain. I was feeling quite cheerful again, for Peter John's photograph was on the mantelpiece and I reckoned that any minute Mary might be at the doorway.

She came in just before midnight. I heard her speak to Barnard in the hall, and then her quick step outside the door. She was preposterously dressed, but she must have done something to her face in the taxi, for the paint was mostly rubbed from it, leaving it very pale.

"Oh, Dick, my darling," she cried, tearing off her cloak and running to my arms. "I never expected you. There's nothing wrong at home?"

"Not that I know of, except that it's deserted. Mary, what on earth brought you here?"

"You're not angry, Dick?"

"Not a bit — only curious."

"How did you know I was here?"

"Guessed. I thought it the likeliest cover to draw. You see I've been watching you dancing to-night. Look

here, my dear, if you put so much paint and powder on your face and jam it so close to old Turpin's chest, it won't be easy for the poor fellow to keep his shirt-front clean."

"You — watched — me — dancing! Were you in that place?"

"Well, I wouldn't say *in* it. But I had a prospect of the show from the gallery. And it struck me that the sooner we met and had a talk the better."

"The gallery! Were you in the house? I don't understand."

"No more do I. I burgled a certain house in a back street for very particular reasons of my own. In the process I may mention that I got one of the worst frights of my life. After various adventures I came to a place where I heard the dickens of a row which I made out to be dance music. Eventually I found a dirty little room with a window and to my surprise looked down on a dancing-hall. I know it, for I had once been there with Archie Roylance. That was queer enough, but imagine my surprise when I saw my wedded wife, raddled like a geisha, dancing with an old friend who seemed to have got himself up to imitate a wax-work."

She seemed scarcely to be listening. "But in the house! Did you see no one?"

"I saw one man and I heard another. The fellow I saw was a man I once met in the small hours with Medina."

"But the other? You didn't see him? You didn't hear him go out?"

"No." I was puzzled at her excitement. "Why are you so keen about the other?"

"Because I think — I'm sure — it was Sandy — Colonel Arbuthnot."

This was altogether beyond me. "Impossible!" I cried. "The place is a lair of Medina's. The man I saw was Medina's servant or satellite. Do you mean to say that Sandy has been exploring that house?"

She nodded. "You see it is the Fields of Eden."

"Oh, I know. I found that out for myself. Do you tell me that Sandy discovered it too?"

"Yes. That is why I was there. That is why I have been living a perfectly loathsome life and am now dressed like a chorus girl."

"Mary," I said solemnly, "my fine brain won't support any more violent shocks. Will you please to sit down beside me, and give me the plain tale of all you have been doing since I said good-bye to you at Fosse?"

"First," she said, "I had a visit from a dramatic critic on holiday, Mr. Alexander Thomson. He said he knew you and that you had suggested that he should call. He came three times to Fosse, but only once to the house. Twice I met him in the woods. He told me a good many things, and one was that he couldn't succeed and you couldn't succeed, unless I helped. He thought that if a woman was lost only a woman could find her. In the end he persuaded me. You said yourself, Dick, that Nanny was quite competent to take charge of Peter John, with Dr. Greenslade so close at hand. And I hear from her every day, and he is very well and happy."

"You came to London. But when?"

"The day you came back from Norway."

"But I've been having letters regularly from you since then."

"That is my little arrangement with Paddock. I took him into my confidence. I send him the letters in batches and he posts one daily."

"Then you've been here more than a fortnight. Have you seen Sandy?"

"Twice. He has arranged my life for me, and has introduced me to my dancing partner, the Marquis de la Tour du Pin, whom you call Turpin. I think I have had the most horrible, the most wearing time that any woman ever had. I have moved in raffish circles and have had to be the most raffish of the lot. Do you know, Dick, I believe I'm really a good actress? I have acquired a metallic voice, and a high silly laugh, and hard eyes, and when I lie in bed at night I blush all over for my shamelessness. I know you hate it, but you can't hate it more than I do. But it had to be done. I couldn't be a 'piker,' as Mr. Blenkiron used to say."

"Any luck?"

"Oh yes," she said wearily. "I have found Miss Victor. It wasn't very difficult, really. When I had made friends with the funny people that frequent these places it wasn't hard to see who was different from the others. They're all mannequins, but the one I was looking for was bound to be the most mannequinish of the lot. I wanted some one without mind or soul, and I found her. Besides, I had a clue to start with. Odell, you know."

"It was the green girl."

She nodded. "I couldn't be certain of course, till I had her lover to help me. He is a good man, your French Marquis. He has played his part splendidly. You see, it would never do to try to *awake* Adela Victor now. We couldn't count on her being able to keep up appearances without arousing suspicion, till the day of release arrived. But something had to be done, and that is my business especially. I have made friends with her, and I talk to her and I have attached her to me just a little, like a dog.

That will give me the chance to do the rest quickly when the moment comes. You cannot bring back a vanished soul all at once unless you have laid some foundation. We have to be very, very careful, for she is keenly watched, but I think — yes, I am sure — it is going well.”

“Oh, bravo!” I cried. “That makes Number Two. I may tell you that I have got Number One.” I gave her a short account of my doings in Norway. “Two of the poor devils will get out of the cage anyhow. I wonder if it wouldn’t be possible to pass the word to Victor and the Duke. It would relieve their anxiety.”

“I thought of that,” she replied, “but Colonel Arbuthnot says No, on no account. He says it might ruin everything. He takes a very solemn view of the affair, you know. And so do I. I have seen Mr. Medina.”

“Where?” I asked in astonishment.

“I got Aunt Doria to take me to a party where he was to be present. Oh, don’t be worried. I wasn’t introduced to him, and he never heard my name. But I watched him, and knowing what I did I was more afraid than I have ever been in my life. He is extraordinarily attractive — no, not attractive — seductive, and he is as cold and hard as chilled steel. You know these impressions I get of people which I can’t explain — you say they are always right. Well, I felt him almost superhuman. He exhales ease and power like a god, but it is a god from a lost world. I can see that, like a god too, it is souls that he covets. Ordinary human badness seems decent in comparison with that Lucifer’s pride of his. I think if I ever could commit murder it would be his life I would take. I should feel like Charlotte Corday. Oh, I’m dismally afraid of him.”

“I’m not,” I said stoutly, “and I see him at closer

quarters than most people." The measure of success we had attained was beginning to make me confident.

"Colonel Arbuthnot is afraid for you," she said. "The two times I have seen him in London he kept harping on the need of your keeping very near to him. I think he meant me to warn you. He says that when you are fighting a man with a long-range weapon the only chance is to hug him. Dick, didn't you tell me that Mr. Medina suggested that you should stay in his house? I have been thinking a lot about that, and I believe it would be the safest plan. Once he saw you secure in his pocket he might forget about you."

"It would be most infernally awkward, for I should have no freedom of movement. But all the same I believe you are right. Things may grow very hectic as we get near the day."

"Besides, you might find out something about Number Three. Oh, Dick, it is the little boy that breaks my heart. The others might escape on their own account — some day, but unless we find *him* he is lost forever. And Colonel Arbuthnot says that, even if we found him, it might be hard to restore the child's mind. Unless — unless —"

Mary's face had become grim, if one could use the word of a thing so soft and gentle. Her hands were tightly clasped, and her eyes had a strained far-away look.

"I am going to find him," she cried. "Listen, Dick. That man despises women and rules them out of his life, except in so far as he can make tools of them. But there is one woman who is going to stop at nothing to beat him. . . . When I think of that little David I grow mad and desperate. I am afraid of myself. Have you no hope to give me?"

"I haven't the shadow of a clue," I said dolefully. "Has Sandy none?"

She shook her head. "He is so small, the little fellow, and so easy to hide."

"If I were in Central Africa, I would get Medina by the throat, and peg him down and torture him till he disgorged."

Again she shook her head. "Those methods are useless here. He would laugh at you, for he isn't a coward — at least I think not. Besides, he is certain to be magnificently guarded. And for the rest he has the entrenchments of his reputation and popularity, and a quicker brain than any of us. He can put a spell of blindness on the world — on all men and nearly all women."

The arrival of Miss Wymondham made me get up to leave. She was still the same odd-looking creature, with a mass of tow-coloured hair piled above her long white face. She had been dancing somewhere, and looked at once dog-tired and excited. "Mary has been having such a good time," she told me. "Even I can scarcely keep pace with her ardent youth. Can't you persuade her to do her hair differently? The present arrangement is so *démodé* and puts her whole figure out of drawing. Nancy Travers was speaking about it only to-night. Properly turned out, she said, Mary would be the most ravishing thing in London. By the way, I saw your friend Sir Archie Roylance at the Parminters'. He is lunching here on Thursday. Will you come, Richard?"

I told her that my plans were vague and that I thought I might be out of town. But I arranged with Mary before I left to keep me informed at the Club of any news that came from Sandy. As I walked back I was infected by her distress over little David Warcliff. That was the most

grievous business of all, and I saw no light in it, for though everything else happened according to plan, we should never be able to bring Medina to book. The more I thought of it the more hopeless our case against him seemed to be. We might free the hostages, but we could never prove that he had had anything to do with them. I could give damning evidence, to be sure, but who would take my word against his? And I had no one to confirm me. Supposing I indicted him for kidnapping and told the story of what I knew about the Blind Spinner and Newhover and Odell? He and the world would simply laugh at me, and I should probably have to pay heavy damages for libel. None of his satellites, I was certain, would ever give him away; they couldn't, even if they wanted to, for they didn't know anything. No, Sandy was right. We might have a measure of success, but there would be no victory. And yet only victory would give us full success, for only to get him on his knees, gibbering with terror, would restore the poor little boy. I strode through the empty streets with a sort of hopeless fury in my heart.

One thing puzzled me. What was Sandy doing in that house behind the curiosity shop, if indeed it was Sandy? Whoever had been there had been in league with the sad grey man whom I watched from behind the bedroom door. Now the man was part of Medina's entourage: I had no doubt about the accuracy of my recollection. Had Sandy dealings with some one inside the enemy's citadel? I didn't see how that was possible, for he had told me he was in deadly danger from Medina, and that his only chance was to make him believe that he was out of Europe. . . . As I went to bed, one thing was very clear in my mind. If Medina asked me to stay with him, I would accept. It

would probably be safer, though I wasn't so much concerned about that, and it would possibly be more fruitful. I might find out something about the grey man.

Next day I went to see Medina, for I wanted him to believe that I couldn't keep away from him. He was in tremendous spirits about something or other, and announced that he was going off to the country for a couple of days. He made me stay to luncheon, when I had another look at Odell, who seemed to be getting fat. "Your wind, my lad," I said to myself, "can't be as good as it should be. You wouldn't have my money in a scrap." I hoped that Medina was going to have a holiday, for he had been doing a good deal lately in the way of speaking, but he said "No such luck." He was going down to the country on business — an estate of which he was a trustee wanted looking into. I asked in what part of England, and he said Shropshire. He liked that neighbourhood and had an idea of buying a place there when he had more leisure.

Somehow that led me to speak of his poetry. He was surprised to learn that I had been studying the little books, and I could see took it as a proof of my devotion. I made a few fulsome observations of their merits, and said that even an ignorant fellow like me could see how dashed good they were. I also remarked that they seemed to me a trifle melancholy.

"Melancholy!" he said. "It's a foolish world, Hannay, and a wise man must have his moods of contempt. Victory loses some of its salt when it is won over fools."

And then he said what I had been waiting for. "I told you weeks ago that I wanted you to take up your quarters with me. Well, I repeat the offer and will take no refusal."

"It is most awfully kind of you," I stammered. "But wouldn't I be in the way?"

"Not in the least. You see the house — it's as large as a barracks. I'll be back from Shropshire by Friday, and I expect you to move in here on Friday evening. We might dine together."

I was content, for it gave me a day or two to look about me. Medina went off that afternoon, and I spent a restless evening. I wanted to be with Mary, but it seemed to me that the less I saw her the better. She was going her own way, and if I showed myself in her neighbourhood it might ruin all. Next day was no better; I actually longed for Medina to return so that I might feel I was doing something, for there was nothing I could turn my hand to, and when I was idle the thought of David Warcliff was always present to torment me. I went out to Hampton Court and had a long row on the river; then I dined at the Club and sat in the little back smoking-room, avoiding any one I knew, and trying to read a book of travels in Arabia. I fell asleep in my chair, and, waking about half-past eleven, was staggering off to bed, when a servant came to tell me that I was wanted on the telephone.

It was Mary; she was speaking from Great Charles Street and her voice was sharp with alarm.

"There's been an awful mishap, Dick," she said breathlessly. "Are you alone? You're sure there's no one there? . . . Archie Roylance has made a dreadful mess of things . . . He came to that dancing-place to-night, and Adela Victor was there, and Odell with her. Archie had seen her before, you know, and apparently was much attracted. No! He didn't recognise me, for when I saw him I kept out of range. But of course he recognised the Marquis. He danced with Adela, and I suppose he talked

nonsense to her — anyhow he made himself conspicuous. The result was that Odell proposed to take her away — I suppose he was suspicious of anybody of Archie's world — and, well, there was a row. The place was very empty — only about a dozen, and mostly a rather bad lot. Archie asked what right he had to carry off the girl, and lost his temper, and the manager was called in — the man with the black beard. He backed up Odell, and then Archie did a very silly thing. He said he was Sir Archibald Roylance and wasn't going to be dictated to by any Jew, and, worse, he said his friend was the Marquis de la Tour du Pin, and that between them they would burst up this show, and that he wouldn't have a poor girl ordered about by a third-rate American bully. . . . I don't know what happened afterwards. The women were hustled out, and I had to go with the rest. . . . But, Dick, it's bad trouble. I'm not afraid so much for Archie, though he has probably got a bad mauling, but the Marquis. They're sure to know who he is and all about him and remember his connection with Adela. They're almost sure to make certain in some horrible way that he can't endanger them again."

"Lord," I groaned, "what a catastrophe! And what on earth can I do? I daren't take any part!"

"No," came a hesitating voice. "I suppose not. But you can warn the Marquis — if nothing has happened to him already."

"Precious poor chance. These fellows don't waste time. But go to bed and sleep, my dear. I'll do my best."

My best at that time of night was pretty feeble. I rang up Victor's house and found, as I expected, that Turpin had not returned. Then I rang up Archie's house in Gros-

venor Street and got the same answer about him. It was no good my going off to the back streets of Marylebone, so I went to bed and spent a wretched night.

Very early next morning I was in Grosvenor Street, and there I had news. Archie's man had just had a telephone message from a hospital to say that his master had had an accident, and would he come round and bring clothes. He packed a bag and he and I drove there at once, and found the miserable Archie in bed, the victim officially of a motor accident. He did not seem to be very bad, but it was a rueful face, much battered about the eyes and bandaged as to the jaw, which was turned on me when the nurse left us.

"You remember what I said about the pug with the diamond studs," he whistled through damaged teeth. "Well, I took him on last night and got tidily laid out. I'm not up to professional standards, and my game leg made me slow."

"You've put your foot into it most nobly," I said. "What do you mean by brawling in a dance-club? You've embarrassed me horribly in the job I'm on."

"But how?" he asked, and but for the bandage his jaw would have dropped.

"Never mind how at present. I want to know exactly what happened. It's more important than you think."

He told me the same story that I had heard from Mary, but much garlanded with objurgations. He denied that he had dined too well — "nothing but a small whisky-and-soda and one glass of port." He had been looking for the girl in green for some time, and having found her, was not going to miss the chance of making her acquaintance. "A melancholy little being with nothin' to say for herself. She's had hard usage from some swine — you could see it

by her eyes — and I expect the pug's the villain. Anyway, I wasn't goin' to stand his orderin' her about like a slave. So I told him so, and a fellow with a black beard chipped in and they began to hustle me. Then I did a dam' silly thing. I tried to solemnise 'em by sayin' who I was, and old Turpin was there, so I dragged his name in. Dashed caddish thing to do, but I thought a Marquis would put the wind up that crowd."

"Did he join in?"

"I don't know — I rather fancy he got scragged at the start. Anyhow I found myself facin' the pug, seein' bright red, and inclined to fight a dozen. I didn't last for more than one round — my game leg cramped me, I suppose. I got in one or two on his ugly face, and then I suppose I took a knock-out. After that I don't remember anything till I woke up in this bed feelin' as if I had been through a mangle. The people here say I was brought in by two bobbies and a fellow with a motor-car, who said I had walked slap into his bonnet at a street corner and hurt my face. He was very concerned about me, but omitted to leave his name and address. Very thoughtful of the sweeps to make sure there would be no scandal. . . . I say, Dick, you don't suppose this will get into the newspapers? I don't want to be placarded as havin' been in such a vulgar shindy just as I'm thinkin' of goin' in for Parliament."

"I don't think there's the remotest chance of your hearing another word about it, unless you talk too much yourself. Look here, Archie, you've got to promise me never to go near that place again, and never on any account whatever to go hunting for that girl in green. I'll tell you my reasons some day, but you can take it that they're good ones. Another thing. You've got to keep out of

Turpin's way. I only hope you haven't done him irreparable damage because of your idiocy last night."

Archie was desperately penitent. "I know I behaved like a cad. I'll go and grovel to old Turpin as soon as they let me up. But he's all right — sure to be. He wasn't lookin' for a fight like me. I expect he only got shoved into the street and couldn't get back again."

I did not share Archie's optimism, and very soon my fear was a certainty. I went straight from the hospital to Carlton House Terrace, and found Mr. Victor at breakfast. I learned that the Marquis de la Tour du Pin had been dining out on the previous evening and had not returned.

CHAPTER XV

HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN DISCOVERED FEAR

I HAVE twice heard from Turpin the story I am going to set down — once before he understood much of it, a second time when he had got some enlightenment — but I doubt whether to his dying day he will ever be perfectly clear about what happened to him.

I have not had time to introduce Turpin properly, and in any case I am not sure that the job is not beyond me. My liking for the French is profound, but I believe there is no race on earth which the average Briton is less qualified to comprehend. For myself, I could far more easily get inside the skin of a Boche. I knew he was as full of courage as a Berserker, pretty mad, but with that queer core of prudence which your Latin possesses and which in the long-run makes his madness less dangerous than an Englishman's. He was high-strung, excitable, imaginative, and I should have said in a general way very sensitive to influences such as Medina wielded. But he was forewarned. Mary had told him the main lines of the business, and he was playing the part she had set him as dutifully as a good child. I had not done justice to his power of self-control. He saw his sweetheart leading that blind unearthly life, and it must have been torture to him to do nothing except look on. But he never attempted to wake her memory, but waited obediently till Mary gave orders, and played the part to perfection of the ordinary half-witted dancing mountebank.

When the row with Archie started, and the scurry be-

gan, he had the sense to see that he must keep out of it. Then he heard Archie speak his real name, and saw the mischief involved in that, for nobody knew him except Mary, and he had passed as a Monsieur Claud Simond from Buenos Aires. When he saw his friend stand up to the bruiser, he started off instinctively to his help, but stopped in time and turned to the door. The man with the black beard was looking at him, but said nothing.

There seemed to be a good deal of racket at the foot of the stairs. One of the girls caught his arm. "No good that way," she whispered. "It's a raid all right. There's another road out. You don't want your name in to-morrow's papers."

He followed her into a little side passage, which was almost empty and very dark, and there he lost her. He was just starting to prospect, when he saw a little dago whom he recognised as one of the bar-tenders. "Up the stairs, monsieur," the man said. "Then first to the left and down again. You come out in the yard of the Apollo Garage. Quick, monsieur, or *les flics* will be here."

Turpin sped up the steep wooden stairs, and found himself in another passage fairly well lit, with a door at each end. He took the one to the left, and dashed through, wondering how he was to recover his hat and coat, and also what had become of Mary. The door opened easily enough, and in his haste he took two steps forward. It swung behind him, so that he was in complete darkness, and he turned back to open it again to give him light. But it would not open. With the shutting of that door he walked clean out of the world.

At first he was angry, and presently, when he realised his situation, a little alarmed. The place seemed to be small, it was utterly dark, and as stuffy as the inside of a

safe. His chief thought at the moment was that it would never do for him to be caught in a raid on a dance-club, for his true name might come out and the harm which Archie's foolish tongue had wrought might be thereby aggravated. But soon he saw that he had stepped out of one kind of danger into what was probably a worse. He was locked in an infernal cupboard in a house which he knew to have the most unholy connections.

He started to grope around, and found that the place was larger than he thought. The walls were bare, the floor seemed to be of naked boards, and there was not a stick of furniture anywhere, nor, so far as he could see, any window. He could not discover the door he had entered by, which on the inside must have been finished dead level with the walls. Presently he found that his breathing was difficult, and that almost put him in a panic, for the dread of suffocation had always been for him the private funk from which the bravest man is not free. To breathe was like having his face tightly jammed against a pillow. He made an effort and controlled himself, for he realised that if he let himself become hysterical he would only suffocate the faster. . . .

Then he declares that he felt a hand pressing on his mouth. . . . It must have been imagination, for he admits that the place was empty, but all the same the hand came again and again — a large soft hand smelling of roses. His nerves began to scream, and his legs to give under him. The roses came down on him in a cloud, and that horrible flabby hand, as big as a hill, seemed to smother him. He tried to move, to get away from it, and before he knew he found himself on his knees. He struggled to get up, but the hand was on him, flattening him out, and that intolerable sweet sickly odour swathed him

in its nauseous folds. . . . And then he lost consciousness. . . .

How long he was senseless he doesn't know, but he thinks it must have been a good many hours. When he came to he was no longer in the cupboard. He was lying on what seemed to be a couch in a room which felt spacious, for he could breathe freely, but it was still as black as the nether pit. He had a blinding headache, and felt rather sick and as silly as an owl. He couldn't remember how he had come there, but as his hand fell on his shirt-front, and he realised he was in dress clothes, he recollected Archie's cry. That was the last clear thing in his head, but it steadied him, for it reminded him how grave was his danger. He has told me that at first he was half stifled with panic, for he was feeling abominably weak; but he had just enough reason left in him to let him take a pull on his nerves. "You must be a man," he repeated to himself. "Even if you have stumbled into hell, you must be a man."

Then a voice spoke out of the darkness, and at the sound of it most of his fright disappeared. It was no voice that he knew, but a pleasant voice, and it spoke to him in French. Not ordinary French, you understand, but the French of his native valley in the South, with the soft slurring patois of his home. It seemed to drive away his headache and nausea, and to soothe every jangled nerve, but it made him weaker. Of that he has no doubt. This friendly voice was making him a child again.

His memory of what it said is hopelessly vague. He thinks that it reminded him of the life of his boyhood — the old château high in a fold of the limestone hills, the feathery chestnuts in the valley bottom, the clear pools where the big trout lived, the snowy winters when the

wolves came out of the forests to the farmyard doors, the hot summers when the roads were blinding white and the turf on the downs grew as yellow as corn. The memory of it was all jumbled, and whatever the voice said its effect was more like music than spoken words. It smoothed out the creases in his soul, but it stole also the manhood from him. He was becoming limp and docile and passive like a weak child.

The voice stopped and he felt a powerful inclination to sleep. Then suddenly, between sleeping and waking, he became aware of a light, a star which glowed ahead of him in the darkness. It waxed and then waned, and held his eyes like a vice. At the back of his head he knew that there was some devilry in the business, that it was something which he ought to resist, but for the life of him he could not remember why.

The light broadened till it was like the circle which a magic lantern makes on a screen. Into the air there crept a strange scent — not the sickly smell of roses, but a hard pungent smell which tantalised him with its familiarity. Where had he met it before? . . . Slowly out of it there seemed to shape a whole world of memories.

Now Turpin before the War had put in some years' service in Africa with the Armée Coloniale as a lieutenant of Spahis, and had gone with various engineering and military expeditions south of the Algerian frontier into the desert. He used to rave to me about the glories of those lost days, that first youth of a man which does not return. . . . This smell was the desert, that unforgettable, untameable thing which stretches from the Mediterranean to the Central African forests, the place where, in the days when it was sea, Ulysses wandered, and where the magic of Circe and Calypso for all the world knows may still linger.

In the moon of light a face appeared, a face so strongly lit up that every grim and subtle line of it was magnified. It was an Eastern face, a lean high-boned Arab face, with the eyes set in a strange slant. He had never seen it before, but he had met something like it when he had dabbled in the crude magic of the sands, the bubbling pot, and the green herb fire. At first it was only a face, half averted, and then it seemed to move so that the eyes appeared, like lights suddenly turned on at night as one looks from without at a dark house.

He felt in every bone a thing he had almost forgotten, the spell and the terror of the desert. It was a cruel and inhuman face, hiding God knows what of ancient horror and sin, but wise as the Sphinx and eternal as the rocks. As he stared at it the eyes seemed to master and envelop him, and, as he put it, suck the soul out of him.

You see he had never been told about Kharáma. That was the one mistake Mary made, and a very natural one, for it was not likely that he and the Indian would foregather. So he had nothing in his poor muddled head to help him to combat this mastering presence. He didn't try. He said he felt himself sinking into a delicious lethargy, like the coma which overtakes a man who is being frozen to death.

I could get very little out of Turpin about what happened next. The face spoke to him, but whether in French or some African tongue he didn't know — French, he thought — certainly not English. I gather that, while the eyes and the features were to the last degree awe-inspiring, the voice was, if anything, friendly. It told him that he was in instant danger, and that the only hope lay in utter impassivity. If he attempted to exercise his own will, he was doomed, and there was sufficient indication of

what that doom meant to shake his lethargy into spasms of childish fear. "Your body is too feeble to move," said the voice, "for Allah has laid His hand on it." Sure enough, Turpin realised that he hadn't the strength of a kitten. "You have surrendered your will to Allah till He restores it to you." That also was true, for Turpin knew he could not summon the energy to brush his hair, unless he was ordered to. "You will be safe," said the voice, "so long as you sleep. You will sleep till I bid you awake."

Sleep he probably did, for once again came a big gap in his consciousness. . . . The next he knew he was being jolted in something that ran on wheels, and he suddenly rolled over on his side, as the vehicle took a sharp turn. This time it didn't take him quite so long to wake up. He found he was in a big motor-car, with his overcoat on, and his hat on the seat beside him. He was stretched out almost at full length, and comfortably propped up with cushions. All this he realised fairly soon, but it was some time before he could gather up the past, and then it was all blurred and sketchy. . . . What he remembered most clearly was the warning that he was in grave peril and was only safe while he did nothing. That was burned in on his mind, and the lesson was pointed by the complete powerlessness of his limbs. He could hardly turn over from his side to his back, and he knew that if he attempted to stand he would fall down in a heap. He shut his eyes and tried to think.

Bit by bit the past pieced itself together. He remembered Archie's cry — and things before that — Mary — the girl in green. Very soon the truth smote him in the face. He had been kidnapped like the rest, and had had the same tricks played on him. . . . But they had only affected his body. As he realised this tremendous fact

Turpin swelled with pride. Some devilry had stolen his physical strength, but his soul was his own still, his memory and his will. A sort of miasma of past fear still clung about him, like the after-taste of influenza, but this only served to make him angry. He was most certainly not going to be beaten. The swine had miscalculated this time; they might have a cripple in their hands, but it would be a very watchful, wary, and determined cripple, quick to seize the first chance to be even with them. His anger made his spirits rise. All his life he had been a man of tropical loves and tempestuous hates. He had loathed the Boche, and free-masons, and communists, and the deputies of his own land, and ever since Adela's disappearance he had nursed a fury against a person or persons unknown: and now every detestation of which he was capable had been focussed against those who were responsible for this night's work. The fools! They thought they had got a trussed sheep, when all the time it was a lame tiger.

The blinds of the car were down, but by small painful movements he managed to make out that there was a man in the front seat beside the chauffeur. By and by he got a corner of the right-hand blind raised, and saw that it was night time and that they were moving through broad streets that looked like a suburb. From the beat of the engine he gathered that the car was a Rolls-Royce, but not, he thought, one of the latest models. Presently the motion became less regular, and he realised that the suburban streets were giving place to country roads. His many expeditions in his Delage had taught him a good deal about the ways out of London, but, try as he might, he could not pick up any familiar landmark. The young moon had set, so he assumed that it was near midnight;

it was a fine, clear night, not very dark, and he picked up an occasional inn and church, but they never seemed to pass through any village. Probably the driver was taking the less frequented roads — a view he was confirmed in by the frequent right-angled turns and the many patches of indifferent surface.

Very soon he found his efforts at reconnaissance so painful that he gave them up, and contented himself with planning his policy. Of course he must play the part of the witless sheep. That duty, he thought, presented no difficulties, for he rather fancied himself as an actor. The trouble was his bodily condition. He did not believe that a constitution as good as his could have taken any permanent damage from the night's work. . . . The night's! He must have been away for more than one night, for the row with Archie had taken place very near twelve o'clock. This must be the midnight following. He wondered what Mr. Victor was thinking about it — and Mary — and Hannay. The miserable Hannay had now four lost ones to look for instead of three! . . . Anyhow the devils had got an ugly prisoner in him. His body must soon be all right, unless of course they took steps to keep it all wrong. At that thought Turpin's jaw set. The rôle of the docile sheep might be difficult to keep up very long.

The next he knew the car had turned in at a gate and was following a dark tree-lined avenue. In another minute it had stopped before the door of a house, and he was being lifted out by the chauffeur and the man from the front seat, and carried into a hall. But first a dark bandana was tied over his eyes, and, as he could do nothing with his arms or legs, he had to submit. He felt himself carried up a short staircase, and then along a corridor into a bedroom, where a lamp was lit. Hands undressed him

— his eyes still bandaged — and equipped him with pyjamas which were not his own, and were at once too roomy and too short. Then food was brought, and an English voice observed that he had better have some supper before going to sleep. The bandage was taken off and he saw two male backs disappearing through the door.

Up till now he had felt no hunger or thirst, but the sight of food made him realise that he was as empty as a drum. By twisting his head he could see it all laid out on the table beside his bed — a good meal it looked — cold ham and galantine, an omelette, a salad, cheese, and a small decanter of red wine. His soul longed for it, but what about his feeble limbs? Was this some new torture of Tantalus?

Desire grew, and like an automaton he moved to it. He felt all numbed, with needles and pins everywhere, but surely he was less feeble than he had been in the car. First he managed to get his right arm extended, and by flexing the elbow and wrist a certain life seemed to creep back. Then he did the same thing with his right leg, and presently found that he could wriggle by inches to the edge of the bed. He was soon out of breath, but there could be no doubt about it — he was getting stronger. A sudden access of thirst enabled him to grasp the decanter, and, after some trouble with the stopper, to draw it to his lips. Spilling a good deal, he succeeded in getting a mouthful. "Larose," he murmured, "and a good vintage. It would have been better if it had been cognac."

But the wine put new life into him. He found he could use both arms, and he began wolfishly on the omelette, making a rather messy job of it. By this time he was feeling a remarkably vigorous convalescent, and he con-

tinued with the cold meat, till the cramp in his left shoulder forced him to lie back on the pillow. It soon passed, and he was able in fair comfort to finish the meal down to the last lettuce leaf of the salad, and the last drop of the claret. The Turpin who reclined again on the bed was to all intents the same vigorous young man who the night before had stumbled through that fateful door into the darkness. But it was a Turpin with a profoundly mystified mind.

He would have liked to smoke, but his cigarettes were in the pocket of his dress clothes which had been removed. So he started to do for his legs what he had already achieved for his arms, and with the same happy results. It occurred to him that, while he was alone, he had better discover whether or not he could stand. He made the effort, rolled out of bed on to the floor, hit the little table with his head and set the dishes rattling.

But after a few scrambles he got on his feet and managed to shuffle round the room. The mischief was leaving his body — so much was plain, and but for a natural stiffness in the joints he felt as well as ever. But what it all meant he hadn't a notion. He was inclined to the belief that somehow he had scored off his enemies, and was a tougher proposition than they had bargained for. They had assuredly done no harm to his mind with their witchcraft, and it looked as if they had also failed with his body. The thought emboldened him. The house seemed quiet; why should he not do a little exploration?

He cautiously opened the door, finding it, somewhat to his surprise, unlocked. The passage was lit by a hanging oil-lamp, carpeted with an old-fashioned drugget, and its walls decorated with a set of flower pictures. Turpin came to the conclusion that never in his life had he been in a

dwelling which seemed more innocent and homelike. He considered himself sensitive to the *nuances* of the sinister in an atmosphere, and there was nothing of that sort in this. He took a step or two down the passage, and then halted, for he thought he heard a sound. Yes, there could be no doubt of it. It was water gushing from a tap. Some one in the establishment was about to have a bath.

Then he slipped back to his room just in time. The some one was approaching with light feet and a rustle of draperies. He had his door shut when the steps passed, and then opened it and stuck his head out. He saw a pink dressing-gown, and above it a slender neck and masses of dark hair. It was the figure which he of all men was likely to know best.

It seemed that the place for him was bed, so he got between the sheets again and tried to think. Adela Victor was here; therefore he was in the hands of her captors, and made a fourth in their bag. But what insanity had prompted these wary criminals to bring the two of them to the same prison? Were they so utterly secure, so confident of their power, that they took this crazy risk? The insolence of it made him furious. In the name of every saint he swore that he would make them regret it. He would free the lady and himself, though he had to burn down the house and wring the neck of every inmate. And then he remembered the delicacy of the business, and the need of exact timing if the other two hostages were not to be lost, and at the thought he groaned.

There was a tap at the door, and a man entered to clear away the supper table. He seemed an ordinary English valet, with his stiff collar and decent black coat and smug expressionless face.

"Beg pardon, my lord," he said, "at what hour would

you like your shavin' water? Seein' it's been a late night I make so bold as to suggest ten o'clock."

Turpin assented, and the servant had hardly gone when another visitor appeared. It was a slim pale man, whom he was not conscious of having seen before, a man with grey hair and a melancholy droop of the head. He stood at the foot of the bed, gazing upon the prostrate Turpin, and his look was friendly. Then he addressed him in French of the most Saxon type.

"Êtes-vous comfortable, monsieur? C'est bien. Soyez tranquille. Nous sommes vos amis. Bon soir."

CHAPTER XVI

OUR TIME IS NARROWED

I LUNCED that day with Mary — alone, for her aunts were both in Paris — and it would have been hard to find in the confines of the British islands a more dejected pair. Mary, who had always a singular placid gentleness, showed her discomposure only by her pallor. As for me I was as restless as a banian.

“I wish I had never touched the thing,” I cried. “I have done more harm than good.”

“You have found Lord Mercot,” she protested.

“Yes, and lost Turpin. The brutes are still three up on us. We thought we had found two, and now we have lost Miss Victor again. And Turpin! They’ll find him an ugly customer, and probably take strong measures with him. They’ll stick to him and the girl and the little boy now like wax; for last night’s performance is bound to make them suspicious.”

“I wonder,” said Mary, always an optimist. “You see, Sir Archie only dragged him in because of his rank. It looked odd his being in Adela’s company, but then all the times he has seen her he never spoke a word to her. They must have noticed that. I’m anxious about Sir Archie. He ought to leave London.”

“Confound him! He’s going to, as soon as he gets out of hospital, which will probably be this afternoon. I insisted on it, but he meant to in any case. He’s heard an authentic report of a green sandpiper nesting somewhere. It would be a good thing if Archie would stick to birds.

He has no head for anything else. . . . And now we've got to start again at the beginning."

"Not quite the beginning," she interposed.

"Dashed near it. They won't bring Miss Victor into that kind of world again, and all your work goes for nothing, my dear. It's uncommon bad luck that you didn't begin to wake her up, for then she might have done something on her own account. But she's still a dummy, and tucked away, you may be sure, in some place where we can never reach her. And we have little more than three weeks left."

"It is bad luck," Mary agreed. "But, Dick, I've a feeling that I haven't lost Adela Victor. I believe that somehow or other we'll soon get in touch with her again. You remember how children when they lose a ball sometimes send another one after it in the hope that one will find the other. Well, we've sent the Marquis after Adela, and I've a notion we may find them both together. We always did that as children." . . . She paused at the word "children" and I saw pain in her eyes. "Oh, Dick, the little boy! We're no nearer him, and he's far the most tragic of all."

The whole business looked so black that I had no word of comfort to give her.

"And to put the lid on it," I groaned, "I've got to settle down in Medina's house this evening. I hate the idea like poison."

"It's the safest way," she said.

"Yes, but it puts me out of action. He'll watch me like a lynx, and I won't be able to take a single step on my own — simply sit there and eat and drink and play up to his vanity. Great Scott, I swear I'll have a row with him and break his head."

"Dick, you're not going to — how do you say it? —

chuck in your hand? Everything depends on you. You're our scout in the enemy's headquarters. Your life depends on your playing the game. Colonel Arbuthnot said so. And you may find out something tremendous. It will be horrible for you, but it isn't for long, and it's the only way."

That was Mary all over. She was trembling with anxiety for me, but she was such a thorough sportsman that she wouldn't take any soft option.

"You may hear something about David Warcliff," she added.

"I hope to God I do. Don't worry, darling. I'll stick it out. But, look here, we must make a plan. I shall be more or less shut off from the world, and I must have a line of communication open. You can't telephone to me at that house, and I daren't ring you up from there. The only chance is the Club. If you have any message, ring up the head porter and make him write it down. I'll arrange that he keeps it quiet, and I'll pick up the messages when I get the chance. And I'll ring you up occasionally to give you the news. But I must be jolly careful, for, likely as not, Medina will keep an eye on me even there. You're in touch with Macgillivray?"

She nodded.

"And with Sandy?"

"Yes, but it takes some time — a day at least. We can't correspond direct."

"Well, there's the lay-out. I'm a prisoner — with qualifications. You and I can keep up some sort of communication. As you say, there's only about another three weeks."

"It would be nothing if only we had some hope."

"That's life, my dear. We've got to go on to the finish

anyhow, trusting that luck will turn in the last ten minutes."

I arrived in Hill Street after tea and found Medina in the back smoking-room, writing letters.

"Good man, Hannay," he said; "make yourself comfortable. There are cigars on that table."

"Had a satisfactory time in Shropshire?" I asked.

"Rotten. I motored back this morning, starting very early. Some tiresome business here wanted my attention. I'm sorry, but I'll be out to dinner to-night. The same thing always happens when I want to see my friends — a hideous rush of work."

He was very hospitable, but his manner had not the ease it used to have. He seemed on the edge about something, and rather preoccupied. I guessed it was the affair of Archie Roylance and Turpin.

I dined alone and sat after dinner in the smoking-room, for Odell never suggested the library, though I would have given a lot to fossick about that place. I fell asleep over the "Field" and was wakened about eleven by Medina. He looked almost tired, a rare thing for him; also his voice was curiously hard. He made some trivial remark about the weather, and a row in the Cabinet which was going on. Then he said suddenly:

"Have you seen Arbuthnot lately?"

"No," I replied, with real surprise in my tone. "How could I? He has gone back to the East."

"So I thought. But I have been told that he has been seen again in England."

For a second I had a horrid fear that he had got on the track of my meeting with Sandy at the Cotswold inn and his visit to Fosse. His next words reassured me.

"Yes. In London. Within the last few days."

It was easy enough for me to show astonishment. "What a crazy fellow he is! He can't stay put for a week together. All I can say is that I hope he won't come my way. I've no particular wish to see him again."

Medina said no more. He accompanied me to my bedroom, asked if I had everything I wanted, bade me good night, and left me.

Now began one of the strangest weeks in my life. Looking back, it has still the inconsequence of a nightmare, but one or two episodes stand out like reefs in a tide-race. When I woke the first morning under Medina's roof I believed that somehow or other he had come to suspect me. I soon saw that that was nonsense, that he regarded me as a pure chattel; but I saw, too, that a most active suspicion of something had been awakened in his mind. Probably Archie's fiasco, together with the news of Sandy, had done it, and perhaps there was in it something of the natural anxiety of a man nearing the end of a difficult course. Anyhow I concluded that this tension of mind on his part was bound to make things more difficult for me. Without suspecting me, he kept me perpetually under his eye. He gave me orders as if I were a child, or rather he made suggestions, which in my character of worshipping disciple I had to treat as orders.

He was furiously busy night and day, and yet he left me no time to myself. He wanted to know everything I did, and I had to give an honest account of my doings, for I had a feeling that he had ways of finding out the truth. One lie discovered would, I knew, wreck my business utterly, for if I were under his power, as he believed I was, it would be impossible for me to lie to him. Consequently I dared not pay many visits to the Club, for he would want to know what I did there. I was on such desperately

thin ice that I thought it best to stay most of my time in Hill Street, unless he asked me to accompany him. I consulted Mary about this, and she agreed that it was the wise course.

Apart from a flock of maids, there was no other servant in the house but Odell. Twice I met the grey, sad-faced man on the stairs, the man I had seen on my first visit, and had watched a week before in the house behind the curiosity shop. I asked who he was, and was told a private secretary, who helped Medina in his political work. I gathered that he did not live regularly in the house, but only came there when his services were required.

Now Mary had said that the other man that evening in Little Fardell Street had been Sandy. If she was right, this fellow might be a friend, and I wondered if I could get in touch with him. The first time I encountered him he never raised his eyes. The second time I forced him by some question to look at me, and he turned on me a perfectly dead expressionless face like a codfish. I concluded that Mary had been in error, for this was the genuine satellite, every feature of whose character had been steam-rollered out of existence by Medina's will.

I was seeing Medina now at very close quarters, and in complete undress, and the impression he had made on me at our first meeting — which had been all overlaid by subsequent happenings — grew as vivid again as daylight. The "good fellow," of course, had gone; I saw behind all his perfection of manner to the naked ribs of his soul. He would talk to me late at night in that awful library, till I felt that he and the room were one presence, and that all the diabolic lore of the ages had been absorbed by this one mortal. You must understand that there was nothing wrong in the ordinary sense with anything he said. If

there had been a phonograph recording his talk it could have been turned on with perfect safety in a girls' school. . . . He never spoke foully, or brutally. I don't believe he had a shadow of those faults of the flesh which we mean when we use the word "vice." But I swear that the most wretched libertine before the bar of the Almighty would have shown a clean sheet compared to his.

I know no word to describe how he impressed me except "wickedness." He seemed to annihilate the world of ordinary moral standards, all the little rags of honest impulse and stumbling kindness with which we try to shelter ourselves from the winds of space. His consuming egotism made life a bare cosmos in which his spirit scorched like a flame. I have met bad men in my day, fellows who ought to have been quietly and summarily put out of existence, but if I had had the trying of them I would have found bits of submerged decency and stunted remnants of good feeling. At any rate they were human, and their beastliness was a degeneration of humanity, not its flat opposite. Medina made an atmosphere which was like a cold bright air in which nothing can live. He was utterly and consumedly wicked, with no standard which could be remotely related to ordinary life. That is why, I suppose, mankind has had to invent the notion of devils. He seemed to be always lifting the corner of a curtain and giving me peeps into a hoary mystery of iniquity older than the stars. . . . I suppose that some one who had never felt his hypnotic power would have noticed very little in his talk except its audacious cleverness, and that some one wholly under his dominion would have been less impressed than me because he would have forgotten his own standards, and been unable to make the comparison. I was just in the right position to understand and tremble.

. . . Oh, I can tell you, I used to go to bed solemnised, frightened half out of my wits, and yet in a violent revulsion, and hating him like hell. I was pretty clear that he was mad, for madness means just this dislocation of the modes of thought which mortals have agreed upon as necessary to keep the world together. His head used to seem as round as a bullet, like nothing you find even in the skulls of cave-men, and his eyes to have a blue light in them like the sunrise of death in an arctic waste.

One day I had a very narrow escape. I went to the Club, to see if there was anything from Mary, and received instead a long cable from Gaudian in Norway. I had just opened it, when I found Medina at my elbow. He had seen me enter, and followed me, in order that we should walk home together.

Now I had arranged a simple code with Gaudian for his cables, and by the mercy of Heaven that honest fellow had taken special precautions, and got some friend to send this message from Christiania. Had it borne the Merdal stamp, it would have been all up with me.

The only course was the bold one, though I pursued it with a quaking heart.

"Hullo," I cried, "here's a cable from a pal of mine in Norway. Did I tell you I had been trying to get a beat on the Leardal for July? I had almost forgotten about the thing. I started inquiring in March, and here's my first news."

I handed him the two sheets and he glanced at the place of dispatch.

"Code," he said. "Do you want to work it out now?"

"If you don't mind waiting a few seconds. It's a simple code of my own invention, and I ought to be able to decipher it pretty fast."

We sat down at one of the tables in the hall, and I took up a pen and a sheet of notepaper. As I think I have mentioned before, I am rather a swell at codes, and this one in particular I could read without much difficulty. I jotted down some letters and numbers, and then wrote out a version, which I handed to Medina. This was what he read:

Upper beat Leardal available from first of month. Rent two hundred and fifty with option of August at one hundred more. No limit to rods. Boat on each pool. Tidal waters can also be got for sea trout by arrangement. If you accept please cable word "Yes." You should arrive not later than June 29th. Bring plenty of bottled prawns. Motor boat can be had from Bergen. Andersen, Grand Hotel, Christiania.

But all the time I was scribbling this nonsense, I was reading the code correctly and getting the message by heart. Here is what Gaudian really sent:

Our friend has quarrelled with keeper and beaten him soundly. I have taken charge at farm and frightened latter into docility. He will remain prisoner in charge of ally of mine till I give the word to release. Meantime, think it safer to bring friend to England and start on Monday. Will wire address in Scotland and wait your instructions. No danger of keeper sending message. Do not be anxious, all is well.

Having got that clear in my head, I tore the cable into small pieces and flung them into the waste-paper basket.

"Well, are you going?" Medina asked.

"Not I. I'm off salmon-fishing for the present." I took a cable form from the table, and wrote: "Sorry, must cancel Leardal plan," signed it "Hannay," addressed it to "Andersen, Grand Hotel, Christiania," and gave it to the porter to send off. I wonder what happened to that tele-

gram. It is probably still stuck up on the hotel-board, awaiting the arrival of the mythical Andersen.

On our way back to Hill Street Medina put his arm in mine, and was very friendly. "I hope to get a holiday," he said, "perhaps just after the beginning of June. Only a day or two off now. I may go abroad for a little. I would like you to come with me."

That puzzled me a lot. Medina could not possibly leave town before the great liquidation, and there could be no motive in his trying to mislead me on such a point, seeing that I was living in his house. I wondered if something had happened to make him change the date. It was of the first importance that I should find this out, and I did my best to draw him about his plans. But I could get nothing out of him except that he hoped for an early holiday, and "early" might apply to the middle of June as well as to the beginning, for it was now the 27th of May.

Next afternoon at tea-time to my surprise Odell appeared in the smoking-room, followed by the long lean figure of Tom Greenslade. I never saw anybody with greater pleasure, but I didn't dare to talk to him alone. "Is your master upstairs?" I asked the butler. "Will you tell him that Dr. Greenslade is here? He is an old friend of his."

We had rather less than two minutes before Medina appeared. "I come from your wife," Greenslade whispered. "She has told me all about the business, and she thought this was the safest plan. I was to tell you that she has news of Miss Victor and the Marquis. They are safe enough. Any word of the little boy?"

He raised his voice as Medina entered. "My dear fellow, this is a great pleasure. I had to be in London for a consultation, and I thought I would look up Hannay. I

hardly hoped to have the luck to catch a busy man like you."

Medina was very gracious — no, that is not the word, there was nothing patronising in his manner. He asked in the most friendly way about Greenslade's practice, and how he liked English country life after his many wanderings. He spoke with an air of regret of the great valleys of loess and the windy Central Asian tablelands where they had first foregathered. Odell brought in tea, and we made as pleasant a trio of friends as you could find in London. I asked a few casual questions about Fosse, and then I mentioned Peter John. Here Greenslade had an inspiration; he told me afterwards that he thought it might be a good thing to open a channel for further communications.

"I think he's all right," he said slowly. "He's been having occasional stomach-aches, but I expect that is only the result of hot weather and the first asparagus. Lady Hannay is a little anxious — you know what she is, and all mothers to-day keep thinking about appendicitis. So I'm keeping my eye on the little man. You needn't worry, Dick."

I take credit to myself for having divined the doctor's intention. I behaved as if I scarcely heard him, and as if Fosse Manor and my family were things infinitely remote. Indeed I switched off the conversation to where Medina had last left it, and I behaved towards Tom Greenslade as if his presence rather bored me, and I had very little to say to him. When he got up to go, it was Medina who accompanied him to the front door. All this was a heavy strain upon my self-command, for I would have given anything for a long talk with him — though I had the sense not to believe his news about Peter John.

"Not a bad fellow, that doctor of yours," Medina observed on his return.

"No," I said carelessly. "Rather a dull dog all the same, with his country gossip. But I wish him well, for it is to him that I owe your friendship."

I must count that episode one of my lucky moments, for it seemed to give Medina some special satisfaction. "Why do you make this your only sitting-room?" he asked. "The library is at your disposal, and it is pleasanter in summer than any other part of the house."

"I thought I might be disturbing your work," I said humbly.

"Not a bit of it. Besides, I've nearly finished my work. After to-night I can slack off, and presently I'll be an idle man."

"And then the holiday?"

"Then the holiday." He smiled in a pleasant boyish way, which was one of his prettiest tricks.

"How soon will that be?"

"If all goes well, very soon. Probably after the second of June. By the way, the Thursday Club dines on the first. I want you to be my guest again."

Here was more food for thought. The conviction grew upon me that he and his friends had put forward the date of liquidation; they must have suspected something — probably from Sandy's presence in England — and were taking no risks. I smoked that evening till my tongue was sore and went to bed in a fever of excitement. The urgency of the matter fairly screamed in my ears, for Macgillivray must know the truth at once, and so must Mary. Mercot was safe, and there was a chance apparently of Turpin and Miss Victor, which must be acted upon instantly if the main date were changed. Of the lit-

tle boy I had given up all hope. . . . But how to find the truth! I felt like a man in a bad dream who is standing on the line with an express train approaching, and does not know how to climb back on to the platform.

Next morning Medina never left me. He took me in his car to the City, and I waited while he did his business, and then to call in Carlton House Terrace a few doors from the Victors' house. I believe it was the residence of the man who led his party in the Lords. After luncheon he solemnly installed me in the library. "You're not much of a reader, and in any case you would probably find my books dull. But there are excellent armchairs to doze in."

Then he went out and I heard the wheels of his car move away. I felt a kind of awe creeping over me when I found myself left alone in the uncanny place, which I knew to be the devil's kitchen for all his schemes. There was a telephone on his writing-table, the only one I had seen in the house, though there was no doubt one in the butler's pantry. I turned up the telephone book and found a number given, but it was not the one on the receiver. This must be a private telephone, by means of which he could ring up anybody he wanted, but of which only his special friends knew the number. There was nothing else in the room to interest me, except the lines and lines of books, for his table was as bare as a bank-manager's.

I tried the books, but most of them were a long sight too learned for me. Most were old, and many were in Latin, and some were evidently treasures, for I would take one down and find it a leather box with inside it a slim battered volume wrapped in wash-leather. But I found in one corner a great array of works of travel, so I selected one of Aurel Stein's books and settled down in an arm-

chair with it. I tried to fix my attention, but found it impossible. The sentences would not make sense to my restless mind, and I could not follow the maps. So I got up again, replaced the work on its shelf, and began to wander about. It was a dull close day, and out in the street a water-cart was sprinkling the dust and children were going park-wards with their nurses. . . . I simply could not account for my disquiet, but I was like a fine lady with the vapours. I felt that somewhere in that room there was something that it concerned me deeply to know.

I drifted toward the bare writing-table. There was nothing on it but a massive silver inkstand in the shape of an owl, a silver tray of pens and oddments, a leather case of notepaper and a big blotting-book. I would never have made a good thief, for I felt both nervous and ashamed as, after listening for steps, I tried the drawers.

They were all locked — all, that is, except a shallow one at the top which looked as if it were meant to contain one of those big engagement tablets which busy men affect. There was no tablet there, but there were two sheets of paper.

Both had been torn from a loose-leaf diary, and both covered the same dates — the fortnight between Monday the 29th of May, and Sunday the 11th of June. In the first the space for the days was filled with entries in Medina's neat writing, entries in some sort of shorthand. These entries were close and thick up to and including Friday the 2d of June; after that there was nothing. The second sheet of paper was just the opposite. The spaces were virgin up to and including the 2d of June; after that, on till the 11th, they were filled with notes.

As I stared at these two sheets, some happy instinct made me divine their meaning. The first sheet contained

the steps that Medina would take up to the day of liquidation, which was clearly the 2d of June. After that, if all went well, came peace and leisure. But if it didn't go well, the second sheet contained his plans — plans I have no doubt for using the hostages, for wringing safety out of certain great men's fears. . . . My interpretation was confirmed by a small jotting in longhand on the first sheet in the space for 2d June. It was the two words "*Dies iræ*," which my Latin was just good enough to construe.

I had lost all my tremors now, but I was a thousandfold more restless. I must get word to Macgillivray at once — no, that was too dangerous — to Mary. I glanced at the telephone and resolved to trust my luck.

I got through to the Wymondhams' house without difficulty. Barnard the butler answered, and informed me that Mary was at home. Then after a few seconds I heard her voice.

"Mary," I said, "the day is changed to the 2d of June. You understand, warn everybody . . . I can't think why you are worrying about that child."

For I was conscious that Medina was entering the room. I managed with my knee to close the shallow drawer with the two sheets in it, and I nodded and smiled to him, putting my hand over the receiver.

"Forgive me using your telephone. Fact is, my wife's in London and she sent me round a note here asking me to ring her up. She's got the boy on her mind."

I put the tube to my ear again. Mary's voice sounded sharp and high-pitched.

"Are you there? I'm in Mr. Medina's library and I can't disturb him talking through this machine. There's no cause to worry about Peter John. Greenslade is usually fussy enough, and if he's calm there's no reason why

you shouldn't be. But if you want another opinion, why not get it? We may as well get the thing straightened out now, for I may be going abroad early in June. . . . Yes, some time after the 2d."

Thank God Mary was quick-witted.

"The 2d is very near. Why do you make such sudden plans, Dick? I can't go home without seeing you. I think I'll come straight to Hill Street."

"All right," I said, "do as you please." I rang off and looked at Medina with a wry smile. "What fussers women are! Do you mind if my wife comes round here? She won't be content till she has seen me. She has come up with a crazy notion of taking down a surgeon to give an opinion on the child's appendix. Tommy-rot! But that's a woman's way."

He clearly suspected nothing. "Certainly let Lady Hannay come here. We'll give her tea. I'm sorry that the drawing-room is out of commission just now. She might have liked to see my miniatures."

Mary appeared in ten minutes, and most nobly she acted her part. It was the very model of a distraught silly mother who bustled into the room. Her eyes looked as if she had been crying and she had managed to disarrange her hat and untidy her hair.

"Oh, I've been so worried," she wailed, after she had murmured apologies to Medina. "He really has had a bad tummy pain, and nurse thought last night that he was feverish. I've seen Mr. Dobson-Wray, and he can come down by the four-forty-five. . . . He's such a precious little boy, Mr. Medina, that I feel we must take every precaution with him. If Mr. Dobson-Wray says it is all right, I promise not to fuss any more. I think a second opinion would please Dr. Greenslade, for he too looked

rather anxious. . . . Oh, no, thank you so much, but I can't stay for tea. I have a taxi waiting, and I might miss my train. I'm going to pick up Mr. Dobson-Wray in Wimpole Street."

She departed in the same tornado in which she had come, just stopping to set her hat straight at one of the mirrors in the hall.

"Of course I'll wire when the surgeon has seen him. And, Dick, you'll come down at once if there's anything wrong, and bring nurses. Poor, poor little darling! . . . Did you say after the 2d of June, Dick? I do hope you'll be able to get off. You need a holiday away from your tiresome family. . . . Good-bye, Mr. Medina. It was so kind of you to be patient with a silly mother. Look after Dick and don't let him worry."

I had preserved admirably the aloof air of the bored and slightly ashamed husband. But now I realised that Mary was not babbling at large, but was saying something which I was meant to take in.

"Poor, poor little darling!" she crooned as she got into the taxi. "I do pray he'll be all right — I *think* he may, Dick. . . . I hope, oh I hope . . . to put your mind at ease before the 2d of June."

As I turned back to Medina I had a notion that the poor little darling was no longer Peter John.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DISTRICT VISITOR IN PALMYRA SQUARE

DURING the last fortnight a new figure had begun to appear in Palmyra Square. I do not know if Macgillivray's watchers reported its presence, for I saw none of their reports, but they must have been cognisant of it, unless they spent all their time in the nearest public-house. It was a district visitor of the familiar type — a woman approaching middle age, presumably a spinster, who wore a plain black dress and, though the weather was warm, a cheap fur round her neck, and carried a rather old black silk satchel. Her figure was good, and had still a suggestion of youth, but her hair, which was dressed very flat and tight and coiled behind in an unfashionable bun, seemed — the little that was seen of it — to be sprinkled with grey. She was dowdy, and yet not altogether dowdy, for there was a certain faded elegance in her air, and an observer might have noted that she walked well. Besides the black satchel she carried usually a sheaf of papers, and invariably and in all weathers a cheap badly-rolled umbrella.

She visited at the doctor's house with the brass plate, and the music-teacher's, and at the various lodging-houses. She was attached, it appeared, to the big church of Saint Jude's a quarter of a mile off, which had just got a new and energetic vicar. She was full of enthusiasm for her vicar, praised his earnestness and his eloquence, and dwelt especially, after the way of elderly maiden ladies, on the charm of his youth. She was also very ready to speak of herself, and eager to explain that her work was voluntary

— she was a gentlewoman of modest but independent means, and had rooms in Hampstead, and her father had been a clergyman at Eastbourne. Very full of her family she was to those who would hear her. There was a gentle simplicity about her manners, and an absence of all patronage, which attracted people and made them willing to listen to her when they would have shut the door on another, for the inhabitants of Palmyra Square are not a courteous or patient or religious folk.

Her aim was to enlist the overworked general servants of the Square in some of the organisations of Saint Jude's. There were all kinds of activities in that enlightened church — choral societies, and mothers' meetings, and country holiday clubs, and classes for adult education. She would hand out sheaves of literature about the Girls' Friendly Society, and the Mothers' Union, and such-like, and try to secure a promise of attendance at some of the Saint Jude's functions. I do not think she had much success at the doctor's and the music-teacher's, though she regularly distributed her literature there. The wretched little maids were too down-trodden and harassed to do more than listen dully on the doorstep and say "Yes'm." Nor was she allowed to see the mistresses, except one of the lodging-house keepers, who was a Primitive Methodist and considered Saint Jude's a device of Satan. But she had better fortune with the maid at Number 4.

The girl belonged to a village in Kent, and the district visitor, it seemed, had been asked to look her up by the rector of her old parish. She was a large flat-faced young woman, slow of speech, heavy of movement, and suspicious of nature. At first she greeted the district visitor coldly, but thawed at the mention of familiar names and accepted a copy of the "Saint Jude's Magazine." Two

days later, when on her afternoon out, she met the district visitor and consented to walk a little way with her. Now the girl's hobby was dress, and her taste was better than most of her class and aspired to higher things. She had a new hat which her companion admired, but she confessed that she was not quite satisfied with it. The district visitor revealed a knowledge of fashions which one would have scarcely augured from her own sombre clothes. She pointed out where the trimming was wrong, and might easily be improved, and the girl — her name was Elsie Outhwaite — agreed. "I could put it right for you in ten minutes," she was told. "Perhaps you would let me come and see you when you have a spare half-hour, and we could do it together. I'm rather clever at hats, and used to help my sisters."

The ice was broken and the aloof Miss Outhwaite became confidential. She liked her place, had no cause to complain, received good wages, and above all was not fussed. "I minds my own business, and Madame minds 'ers," she said. Madame was a foreigner, and had her queer ways, but had also her good points. She did not interfere unnecessarily, and was not mean. There were handsome presents at Christmas, and every now and then the house would be shut up and Miss Outhwaite returned to Kent on generous board wages. It was not a hard billet, though of course there were a lot of visitors, Madame's clients. "She's a massoose, you know, but very respectable." When asked if there were no other inmates of the house she became reticent. "Not what you would call reg'lar part of the family," she admitted. "There's an old lady, Madame's aunt, that stops with us a bit, but I don't see much of 'er. Madame attends to 'er 'erself, and she 'as her private room. And of course there's . . ." Miss

Outhwaite seemed suddenly to recollect something, and changed the subject.

The district visitor professed a desire to make Madame's acquaintance, but was not encouraged. "She's not the sort for the likes of you. She don't 'old with churches and God and such-like — I've 'eard 'er say so. You won't be getting 'er near Saint Jude's, miss."

"But if she is so clever and nice I would like to meet her. She could advise me about some of the difficult questions in this big parish. Perhaps she would help with our Country Holidays."

Miss Outhwaite primmed her lips and didn't think so. "You've got to be ill and nervy for Madame to have an interest in you. I'll take in your name if you like, but I expect Madame won't be at 'ome to you."

It was eventually arranged that the district visitor should call at Number 4 the following afternoon and bring the materials for the reconstructed hat. She duly presented herself, but was warned away by a flustered Miss Outhwaite. "We're that busy to-day I 'aven't a minute to myself." Sunday was suggested, but it appeared that that was the day when the district visitor was fully occupied, so a provisional appointment was made for the next Tuesday evening.

This time all went well. Madame was out, and the district visitor spent a profitable hour in Miss Outhwaite's room. Her nimble fingers soon turned the hat, purchased in Queen's Crescent for ten and sixpence, into a distant imitation of a costlier mode. She displayed an innocent interest in the household, and asked many questions which Miss Outhwaite, now in the best of tempers, answered readily. She was told of Madame's habits, her very occasional shortness of temper, her love of every tongue

but English. "The worst of them furriners," said Miss Outhwaite, "is that you can't never be sure what they thinks of you. Half the time I'm with Madame and her aunt they're talking some 'eathen language."

As she departed the district visitor was given a sketch of the topography of the house about which she showed an unexpected curiosity. Before she left there was a slight *contretemps*. Madame's latch-key was heard in the door and Miss Outhwaite had a moment of panic. "Here, miss, I'll let you out through the kitchen," she whispered. But her visitor showed no embarrassment. "I'd like to meet Madame Breda," she declared. "This is a good chance."

Madame's plump dark face showed surprise, and possibly annoyance, as she observed the two. Miss Outhwaite hastened to explain the situation with a speed which revealed nervousness. "This is a lady from Saint Jude's, Madame," she said. "She comes 'ere districk-visiting and she knows the folk in Radhurst, where I comes from, so I made bold to ask her in."

"I am very glad to meet you, Madame Breda," said the district visitor. "I hope you don't mind my calling on Elsie Outhwaite. I want her to help in our Girls' Friendly Society work."

"You have been here before, I think," was the reply in a sufficiently civil tone. "I have seen you in the Square sometimes. There is no objection on my part to Outhwaite's attending your meetings, but I warn you that she has very little free time." The woman was a foreigner, no doubt, but on this occasion her English showed little trace of accent.

"That is very good of you. I should have asked your permission first, but you were unfortunately not at home when I called, and Elsie and I made friends by accident. I hope you will let me come again."

As the visitor descended the steps and passed through the bright green gate into the gathering dusk of the Square, Madame Breda watched her contemplatively from one of the windows.

The lady came again four days later — it must, I think, have been the 29th of May. Miss Outhwaite, when she opened the door, looked flustered. "I can't talk to you to-night, miss. Madame's orders is that when you next came you was to be shown in to her room."

"How very kind of her!" said the lady. "I should greatly enjoy a talk with her. And, Elsie — I've got such a nice present for you — a hat which a friend gave me and which is too young — really too young — for me to wear. I'm going to give it you, if you'll accept it. I'll bring it in a day or two."

The district visitor was shown into the large room on the right-hand side of the hall where Madame received her patients. There was no one there except a queer-looking little girl in a linen smock, who beckoned her to follow to the folding-doors which divided the apartment from the other at the back. The lady did a strange thing, for she picked up the little girl, held her a second in her arms, and kissed her — after the emotional habit of the childless *dévoté*. Then she passed through the folding-doors.

It was an odd apartment in which she found herself — much larger than could have been guessed from the look of the house, and, though the night was warm, there was a fire lit, a smouldering fire which gave off a fine blue smoke. Madame Breda was there, dressed in a low-cut gown as if she had been dining out, and looking handsome and dark and very foreign in the light of the shaded lamps. In an armchair by the hearth sat a wonderful old lady, with a thing like a mantilla over her snow-white hair. It

was a room so unlike anything in her narrow experience that the newcomer stood hesitating as the folding-doors shut behind her.

"Oh, Madame Breda, it is so very kind of you to see me," she faltered.

"I do not know your name," Madame said, and then she did a curious thing, for she lifted a lamp and held it in the visitor's face, scrutinising every line of her shabby figure.

"Miss Clarke — Agnes Clarke. I am the eldest of three sisters — the other two are married — you may have heard of my father — he wrote some beautiful hymns, and edited —"

"How old are you?" Madame broke in, still holding up the lamp.

The district visitor gave a small nervous laugh. "Oh, I am not so very old — just over forty — well, to be quite truthful, nearly forty-seven. I feel so young sometimes that I cannot believe it, and then — at other times — when I am tired — I feel a hundred. Alas! I have many useless years behind me. But then we all have, don't you think? The great thing is to be resolved to make the most of every hour that remains to us. Mr. Empson at Saint Jude's preached such a beautiful sermon last Sunday about that. He said we must give every unforgiving minute its sixty seconds' worth of distance run — I think he was quoting poetry. It is terrible to think of unforgiving minutes."

Madame did not appear to be listening. She said something to the older lady in a foreign tongue.

"May I sit down, please?" the visitor asked. "I have been walking a good deal to-day."

Madame waved her away from the chair she seemed

about to take. "You will sit there, if you please," she said, pointing to a low couch beside the old woman.

The visitor was obviously embarrassed. She sat down on the edge of the couch, a faded nervous figure compared to the two masterful personages, and her fingers played uneasily with the handle of her satchel.

"Why do you come to this house?" Madame asked, and her tone was almost menacing. "We have nothing to do with your church."

"Oh, but you live in the parish, and it's such a large and difficult parish, and we want help from every one. You cannot imagine how horrible some of the slums are — what bitter poverty in these bad times — and the worn-out mothers and the poor little neglected children. We are trying to make it a brighter place."

"Do you want money?"

"We always want money." The district visitor's face wore an ingratiating smile. "But we want chiefly personal service. Mr. Empson always says that one little bit of personal service is better than a large subscription — better for the souls of the giver and the receiver."

"What do you expect to get from Outhwaite?"

"She is a young girl from a country village and alone in London. She is a good girl, I think, and I want to give her friends and innocent amusement. And I want her help too in our work."

The visitor started, for she found the hand of the old woman on her arm. The long fingers were running down it and pressing it. Hitherto the owner of the hand had not spoken, but now she said:

"This is the arm of a young woman. She has lied about her age. No woman of forty-seven ever had such an arm."

The soft passage of the fingers had suddenly become a grip of steel, and the visitor cried out.

"Oh, please, please, you are hurting me. . . . I do not tell lies. I am proud of my figure — just a little. It is like my mother's, and she was so pretty. But oh! I am not young. I wish I was. I'm afraid I'm quite old when you see me by daylight."

The grip had relaxed, and the visitor moved along the couch to be out of its reach. She had begun to cry in a helpless silly way, as if she were frightened. The two other women spoke to each other in a strange tongue, and then Madame said:

"I will not have you come here. I will not have you meddle with my servants. I do not care a fig for your church. If you come here again you will repent it."

Her tone was harsh, and the visitor looked as if her tears would begin again. Her discomposure had deprived her of the faded grace which had been in her air before, and she was now a pathetic and flimsy creature, like some elderly governess pleading against dismissal.

"You are cruel," she sighed. "I am so sorry if I have done anything wrong, but I meant it for the best. I thought that you might help me, for Elsie said you were clever and kind. Won't you think of poor Elsie? She is so young and far from her people. Mayn't she come to Saint Jude's sometimes?"

"Outhwaite has her duties at home, and so I daresay have you, if truth was spoken. Bah! I have no patience with restless English old maids. They say an Englishman's house is his castle, and yet there is a plague of barren virgins always buzzing round it in the name of religion and philanthropy. Listen to me. I will not have you in this house. I will not have you talking to Outhwaite. I

will not have an idle woman spying on my private affairs."

The visitor dabbed her eyes with a wisp of handkerchief. The old woman had stretched out her hand again and would have laid it on her breast, but she had started up violently. She seemed to be in a mood between distress and fear. She swallowed hard before her voice came, and then it quavered.

"I think I had better go. You have wounded me very deeply. I know I'm not clever, but I try so hard . . . and . . . and — it pains me to be misunderstood. I am afraid I have been tactless, so please forgive me . . . I won't come again . . . I'll pray that your hearts may some day be softened."

She seemed to make an effort to regain composure, and with a final dab at her eyes smiled shakily at the unrelenting Madame, who had touched an electric bell. She closed the folding-doors gently behind her, like a repentant child who has been sent to bed. The front room was in darkness, but there was a light in the hall where Miss Outhwaite waited to show her out.

At the front door the district visitor had recovered herself.

"Elsie," she whispered, "Madame Breda does not want me to come again. But I must give you the hat I promised you. I'll have it ready by Thursday night. I'm afraid I may be rather late — after eleven perhaps — but don't go to bed till I come. I'll go round to the back door. It's such a smart pretty hat. I know you'll love it."

Once in the Square she looked sharply about her, cast a glance back at Number 4, and then walked away briskly. There was a man lounging at the corner to whom she spoke; he nodded and touched his hat, and a big motor-

car, which had been waiting in the shadows on the other side, drew up at the kerb. It seemed a strange conveyance for the district visitor, but she entered it as if she were used to it, and when it moved off it was not in the direction of her rooms in Hampstead.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NIGHT OF THE FIRST OF JUNE

THE last two days of May were spent by me in the most miserable restlessness and despondency. I was cut off from all communications with my friends and I did not see how I could reopen them. For Medina, after his late furious busyness, seemed to have leisure again, and he simply never let me out of his sight. I daresay I might have managed a visit to the Club and a telephone message to Mary, but I durst not venture it, for I realised as I had never done before how delicate was the ground I walked on and how one false step on my part might blow everything sky-high. It would have mattered less if I had been hopeful of success, but a mood of black pessimism had seized me. I could count on Mary passing on my news to Macgillivray and on Macgillivray's taking the necessary steps to hasten the rounding-up; by the second of June Mercot would be restored to his friends, and Miss Victor too, if Mary had got on her track again. But who was arranging all that? Was Mary alone in the business, and where was Sandy? Mercot and Gaudian would be arriving in Scotland, and telegraphing to me any moment, and I could not answer them. I had the maddening feeling that everything was on a knife edge, that the chances of a blunder were infinite, and that I could do nothing. To crown all, I was tortured by the thought of David Warcliff. I had come to the conclusion that Mary's farewell words at Hill Street had meant nothing: indeed, I couldn't see how she could have found out anything about the little boy, for as yet we had never hit on the faintest clue,

and the thought of him made success with the other two seem no better than failure. Likewise I was paying the penalty for the assurance about Medina which I had rashly expressed to Mary. I felt the terror of the man in a new way; he seemed to me impregnable beyond the hope of assault; and while I detested him I also shuddered at him — a novel experience, for hitherto I had always found that hatred drove out fear.

He was abominable during those two days — abominable but also wonderful. He seemed to love the sight of me, as if I were a visible and intimate proof of his power, and he treated me as an Oriental tyrant might treat a favourite slave. He unbent to me as a relief to his long spiritual tension, and let me see the innermost dreams of his heart. I realised with a shudder that he thought me a part of that hideous world he had created, and — I think for the first time in the business — I knew fear on my own account. If he dreamed I could fail him he would become a ravening beast. . . . I remember that he talked a good deal of politics, but ye gods! what a change from the respectable conservative views which he had once treated me to — a Tory revival owing to the women and that sort of thing! He declared that behind all the world's creeds, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and the rest, lay an ancient devil-worship and that it was raising its head again. Bolshevism, he said, was a form of it, and he attributed the success of Bolshevism in Asia to a revival of what he called Shamanism — I think that was the word. By his way of it the War had cracked the veneer everywhere and the real stuff was showing through. He rejoiced in the prospect, because the old faiths were not ethical codes but mysteries of the spirit, and they gave a chance for men who had found the ancient magic. I think he wanted to

win everything that civilisation would give him, and then wreck it, for his hatred of Britain was only a part of his hatred of all that most men hold in love and repute. The common anarchist was a fool to him, for the cities and temples of the whole earth were not sufficient sacrifice to appease his vanity. I knew now what a Goth and a Hun meant, and what had been the temper of scourges like Attila and Timour. . . . Mad, you will say. Yes, mad beyond doubt, but it was the most convincing kind of madness. I had to fight hard, by keeping my mind firm on my job, to prevent my nerve giving.

I went to bed on the last night of May in something very near despair, comforting myself, I remember, by what I had said to Mary, that one must go on to the finish and trust to luck changing in the last ten minutes. I woke to a gorgeous morning, and when I came down to breakfast I was in a shade better spirits. Medina proposed a run out into the country and a walk on some high ground. "It will give us an appetite for the Thursday dinner," he said. Then he went upstairs to telephone, and I was in the smoking-room filling my pipe when suddenly Greenslade was shown in.

I didn't listen to what he had to say, but seized a sheet of paper and scribbled a note: "Take this to the head porter at the Club and he will give you any telegram there is for me. If there is one from Gaudian, as there must be, wire him to start at once and go straight to Julius Victor. Then wire the Duke to meet him there. Do you understand? Now, what have you to tell me?"

"Only that your wife says things are going pretty well. You must turn up to-night at ten-thirty at the Fields of Eden. Also somehow you must get a latchkey for this house, and see that the door is not chained."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"And Peter John?"

Greenslade was enlarging on Peter John's case when Medina entered. "I came round to tell Sir Richard that it was all a false alarm. Only the spring fret. The surgeon was rather cross at being taken so far on a fool's errand. Lady Hannay thought he had better hear it from me personally, for then he could start on his holiday with an easy mind."

I was so short with him that Medina must have seen how far my thoughts were from my family. As we motored along the road to Tring I talked of the approaching holiday, like a toadying schoolboy who has been asked to stay for a cricket week with some senior. Medina said he had not fixed the place, but it must be somewhere south in the sun — Algiers, perhaps, and the fringes of the desert, or better still some remote Mediterranean spot where we could have both sunlight and blue sea. He talked of the sun like a fire-worshipper. He wanted to steep his limbs in it, and wash his soul in light, and swim in wide warm waters. He rhapsodised like a poet, but what struck me about his rhapsodies was how little sensuous they were. The man's body was the most obedient satellite of his mind, and I don't believe he had any weakness of the flesh. What he wanted was a bath of radiance for his spirit.

We walked all day on the hills around Ivinghoe, and had a late lunch in the village inn. He spoke very little, but strode over the thymy downs with his eyes abstracted. Once, as we sat on the summit, he seemed to sigh and his face for a moment was very grave.

"What is the highest pleasure?" he asked suddenly. "Attainment? . . . No. Renunciation."

"So I've heard the parsons say," I observed.

He did not heed me. "To win everything that mankind has ever striven for, and then to cast it aside. To be Emperor of the Earth and then to slip out of the ken of mankind and take up the sandals and begging-bowl. The man who can do that has conquered the world — he is not a king but a god. Only he must be a king first to achieve it."

I cannot hope to reproduce the atmosphere of that scene, the bare top of the hill in the blue summer weather, and that man, nearing, as he thought, the summit of success, and suddenly questioning all mortal codes of value. In all my dealings with Medina I was obsessed by the sense of my inferiority to him, that I was like a cab horse compared to an Arab stallion, and now I felt it like a blow in the face. That was the kind of thing Napoleon might have said — and done — had his schemes not gone astray. I knew I was contending with a devil, but I know also that it was a great devil.

We returned to town just in time to dress for dinner, and all my nervousness revived a hundredfold. This was the night of crisis, and I loathed having to screw myself up to emergencies late in the day. Such things should take place in the early morning. It was like going over the top in France; I didn't mind it so much when it happened during a drizzling dawn, when one was anyhow depressed and only half-awake, but I abominated an attack in the cold-blooded daylight, or in the dusk when one wanted to relax.

That evening I shaved, I remember, very carefully, as if I were decking myself out for a sacrifice. I wondered what would be my feelings when I next shaved. I wondered what Mary and Sandy were doing. . . .

What Mary and Sandy were doing at that precise moment I do not know, but I can now unfold certain contemporary happenings which were then hid from me. . . . Mercot and Gaudian were having a late tea in the Midland express, having nearly broken their necks in a furious motor race to catch the train at Hawick. The former was clean and shaven, his hair nicely cut, and his clothes a fairly well-fitting ready-made suit of flannels. He was deeply sunburnt, immensely excited, and constantly breaking in on Gaudian's study of the works of Sir Walter Scott.

"Newhover is to be let loose to-day. What do you suppose he'll do?" he asked.

"Nothing — yet awhile," was the answer. "I said certain things to him. He cannot openly go back to Germany, and I do not think he dare come to England. He fears the vengeance of his employer. He will disappear for a little, and then emerge in some new crime with a new name and a changed face. He is the eternal scoundrel."

The young man's face lighted up pleasantly. "If I live to be a hundred," he said, "I can't enjoy anything half as much as that clip I gave him on the jaw."

In a room in a country house on the Middlesex and Bucks borders Turpin was talking to a girl. He was in evening dress, a very point-device young man, and she was wearing a wonderful gown, grass-green in colour and fantastically cut. Her face was heavily made up, and her scarlet lips and stained eyebrows stood out weirdly against the dead white of her skin. But it was a different face from that which I first saw in the dancing-hall. Life had come back to it, the eyes were no longer dull like pebbles,

but were again the windows of a soul. There was still fear in those eyes and bewilderment, but they were human again, and shone at this moment with a wild affection.

"I am terrified," she said. "I have to go to that awful place with that awful man. Please, Antoine, please, do not leave me. You have brought me out of a grave, and you cannot let me slip back again."

He held her close to him and stroked her hair.

"I think it is — how do you say it? — the last lap. My very dear one, we cannot fail our friends. I follow you soon. The grey man — I do not know his name — he told me so, and he is a friend. A car is ordered for me half an hour after you drive off with that Odell."

"But what does it all mean?" she asked.

"I do not know, but I think — I am sure — it is the work of our friends. Consider, my little one. I am brought to the house where you are, but those who have charge of you do not know I am here. When Odell comes I am warned and locked in my room. I am not allowed out of it. I have had no exercise except sparring with that solemn English valet. He indeed has been most amiable, and has allowed me to keep myself in form. He boxes well, too, but I have studied under our own Jules and he is no match for me. But when the coast is clear I am permitted to see you, and I have waked you from sleep, my princess. Therefore so far it is good. As to what will happen to-night I do not know, but I fancy it is the end of our troubles. The grey man has told me as much. If you go back to that dance place, I think I follow you, and then we shall see something. Have no fear, little one. You go back as a prisoner no more, but as an actress to play a part, and I know you will play the part well. You will not permit the man Odell to suspect. Presently I come, and I

think there will be an *éclaircissement* — also, please God, a reckoning.”

The wooden-faced valet entered and signed to the young man, who kissed the girl and followed him. A few minutes later Turpin was in his own room, with the door locked behind him. Then came a sound of the wheels of a car outside, and he listened with a smile on his face. As he stood before the glass putting the finishing touches to his smooth hair he was still smiling — an ominous smile.

Other things, which I did not know about, were happening that evening. From a certain modest office near Tower Hill a gentleman emerged to seek his rooms in Mayfair. His car was waiting for him at the street corner, but to his surprise as he got into it some one entered also from the other side, and the address to which the car ultimately drove was not Clarges Street. The office, too, which he had left locked and bolted was presently open, and men were busy there till far into the night — men who did not belong to his staff. An eminent publicist, who was the special patron of the distressed populations of Central Europe, was starting out to dine at his club, when he was unaccountably delayed, and had to postpone his dinner. The Spanish copper company in London Wall had been doing little business of late, except to give luncheons to numerous gentlemen, but that night its rooms were lit, and people who did not look like city clerks were investigating its documents. In Paris a certain French count of royalist proclivities, who had a box that night for the opera and was giving a little dinner beforehand, did not keep his appointment, to the discomfiture of his guests, and a telephone message to his rooms near the Champs Elysée elicited no reply. There was a gruff fellow

at the other end who discouraged conversation. A worthy Glasgow accountant, an elder of the kirk and a prospective candidate for Parliament, did not return that evening to his family, and the police, when appealed to, gave curious answers. The office, just off Fleet Street, of the "Christian Advocate" of Milwaukee, a paper which cannot have had much of a circulation in England, was filled about six o'clock with silent preoccupied people, and the manager, surprised and rather wild of eye, was taken off in a taxi by two large gentlemen who had not had previously the honour of his acquaintance. Odd things seemed to be happening up and down the whole world. More than one ship did not sail at the appointed hour because of the interest of certain people in the passenger lists; a meeting of decorous bankers in Genoa was unexpectedly interrupted by the police; offices of the utmost respectability were occupied and examined by the blundering minions of the law; several fashionable actresses did not appear to gladden their admirers, and more than one pretty dancer was absent from the scene of her usual triumphs; a Senator in Western America, a high official in Rome, and four deputies in France found their movements restricted and a Prince of the Church, after receiving a telephone message, fell to his prayers. A mining magnate in Westphalia, visiting Antwerp on business, found that he was not permitted to catch the train he had settled on. Five men, all highly placed, and one woman, for no cause apparent to their relatives, chose to rid themselves of life between the hours of six and seven. There was an unpleasant occurrence in a town on the Loire, where an Englishman, motoring to the south of France — a typical English squire, well known in hunting circles in Shropshire — was visited at his hotel by two ordinary French-

men, whose conversation seemed unpalatable to him. He was passing something from his waistcoat pocket to his mouth, when they had the audacity to lay violent hands on him, and to slip something over his wrists.

The grey weather had gone, and it was a heavenly clear evening when Medina and I set out to walk the half-mile to Mervyn Street. I had been so cloistered and harassed during the past weeks that I had missed the coming of summer. Suddenly the world seemed to have lighted up, and the streets were filled with that intricate odour of flowers, scent, hot wood pavements and asphalt, which is the summer smell of London. Cars were waiting at house-doors, and women in pretty clothes getting into them; men were walking dinner-wards, with some of whom we exchanged greetings; the whole earth seemed full of laughter and happy movement. And it was shut off from me. I seemed to be living on the other side of a veil from this cheerful world, and I could see nothing but a lonely old man with a tragic face waiting for a lost boy. There was one moment at the corner of Berkeley Square when I accidentally jostled Medina, and had to clench my hands and bite my lips to keep myself from throttling him there and then.

The dining-room in Mervyn Street looked west, and the evening light strove with the candles on the table, and made a fairy-like scene of the flowers and silver. It was a full meeting — fifteen, I think — and the divine weather seemed to have put everybody in the best of spirits. I had almost forgotten Medina's repute with the ordinary man, and was staggered anew at the signs of his popularity. He was in the chair that evening, and a better chairman of such a dinner I have never seen. He had the right word

for everybody, and we sat down to table like a party of undergraduates celebrating a successful cricket-match.

I was on the chairman's right hand, next to Burminster, with Palliser-Yeates opposite me. At first the talk was chiefly about the Derby and Ascot entries, about which Medina proved uncommonly well posted. He had a lot of inside knowledge from the Chilton stables, and showed himself a keen critic of form; also he was a perfect pundit about the pedigree of race-horses, and made Burminster, who fancied himself in the same line, gape with admiration. I suppose a brain like his could get up any subject at lightning speed, and he thought this kind of knowledge useful to him, for I don't believe he cared more for a horse than for a cat.

Once, during the Somme battle, I went to dine at a French château behind the lines, as the guest of the only son of the house. It was an ancient place, with fishponds and terraces, and there were only two people in it, an old Comtesse and a girl of fifteen called Simone. At dinner, I remember, a decrepit butler filled for me five glasses of different clarets, till I found the one I preferred. Afterwards I walked in the garden with Simone in a wonderful yellow twilight, watching the fat carp in the ponds, and hearing the grumbling of the distant guns. I felt in that hour the poignant contrast of youth and innocence and peace with that hideous world of battle a dozen miles off. To-night I had the same feeling — the jolly party of clean, hard, decent fellows, and the abominable hinterland of mystery and crime of which the man at the head of the table was the master. I must have been poor company, but happily everybody was talkative, and I did my best to grin at Burminster's fooling.

Presently the talk drifted away from sport. Palliser-

Yeates was speaking, and his fresh boyish colour contrasted oddly with his wise eyes and grave voice.

"I can't make out what is happening," he said in reply to a remark of Leithen's. "The City has suddenly become jumpy, and there's no reason in the facts that I can see for it. There's been a good deal of realisation of stocks, chiefly by foreign holders, but there are a dozen explanations of that. No, there's a kind of *malaise* about, and it's unpleasantly like what I remember in June, 1914. I was in Whittingtons' then, and we suddenly found the foundations beginning to crumble — oh yes, before the Serajevo murders. You remember Charlie Esmond's smash — well, that was largely due to the spasm of insecurity that shook the world. People now and then get a feeling in their bones that something bad is going to happen. And probably they are right, and it has begun to happen."

"Good Lord!" said Leithen. "I don't like this. Is it another war?"

Palliser-Yeates did not answer at once. "It looks like it. I admit it's almost unthinkable, but then all wars are really unthinkable, till you're in the middle of them."

"Nonsense!" Medina cried. "There's no nation on the globe fit to go to war, except half-civilised races with whom it is the normal condition. You forget how much we know since 1914. You couldn't get even France to fight without provoking a revolution — a middle-class revolution, the kind that succeeds."

Burminster looked relieved. "The next war," he said, "will be a dashed unpleasant affair. So far as I can see there will be very few soldiers killed, but an enormous number of civilians. The safest place will be the front.

There will be such a rush to get into the army that we'll have to have conscription to make people remain in civil life. The *embusqués* will be the regulars."

As he spoke some one entered the room, and to my amazement I saw that it was Sandy.

He was looking extraordinarily fit and as brown as a berry. He murmured an apology to the chairman for being late, patted the bald patch on Burminster's head, and took a seat at the other end of the table. "I'll cut in where you've got to," he told the waiters. "No — don't bother about fish. I want some English roast beef and a tankard of beer."

There was a chorus of questions.

"Just arrived an hour ago. I've been in the East — Egypt and Palestine. Flew most of the way back."

He nodded to me, and smiled at Medina and raised his tankard to him.

I was not in a good position for watching Medina's face, but so far as I could see it was unchanged. He hated Sandy, but he didn't fear him now, when his plans had practically come to fruition. Indeed he was very gracious to him, and asked in his most genial tones what he had been after.

"Civil aviation," said Sandy. "I'm going to collar the pilgrim traffic to the Holy Places. You've been in Mecca?" he asked Pugh, who nodded. "You remember the *hamelidari* crowd who used to organise the transport from Mesopot. Well, I'm a *hamelidari* on a big scale. I am prepared to bring the rank of *hadji* within reach of the poorest and feeblest. I'm going to be the great benefactor of the democracy of Islam, by means of a fleet of patched-up 'planes and a few kindred spirits that know the East. I'll let you fellows in on the ground-floor when I float my

company. John" — he addressed Palliser-Yeates — "I look to you to manage the flotation."

Sandy was obviously ragging, and no one took him seriously. He sat there with his merry brown face, looking absurdly young and girlish, so that the most suspicious could have seen nothing more in him than the ordinary mad Englishman who lived for adventure and novelty. Me he never addressed, and I was glad of it, for I was utterly at sea. What did he mean by turning up now? What part was he to play in the events of the night? I could not have controlled the anxiety in my voice if I had been forced to speak to him.

A servant brought Medina a note, which he opened at leisure and read. "No answer," he said, and stuffed it into his pocket. I had a momentary dread that he might have got news of Macgillivray's round-up, but his manner reassured me.

There were people there who wanted to turn Sandy to other subjects, especially Fulleylove and the young Cambridge don, Nightingale. They wanted to know about South Arabia, of which at the time the world was talking. Some fellow, I forget his name, was trying to raise an expedition to explore it.

"It's the last geographical secret left unriddled," he said, and now he spoke seriously. "Well, perhaps not quite the last. I'm told there's still something to be done with the southern tributaries of the Amazon. Mornington, you know, believes there's a chance of finding some of the Inca people still dwelling in the unexplored upper glens. But all the rest have gone. Since the beginning of the century we've made a clean sweep of the jolly old mysteries that made the world worth living in. We have been to both the Poles, and to Lhasa, and to the Mountains of

the Moon. We haven't got to the top of Everest yet, but we know what it is like. Mecca and Medina are as stale as Bournemouth. We know that there's nothing very stupendous in the Brahmaputra gorges. There's little left for a man's imagination to play with, and our children will grow up in a dull, shrunken world. Except, of course, the Great Southern Desert of Arabia."

"Do you think it can be crossed?" Nightingale asked.

"It's hard to say, and the man who tried it would take almighty risks. I don't fancy myself pinning my life to milk camels. They're chancy brutes."

"I don't believe there's anything there," said Fulleylove, "except eight hundred miles of soft sand"

"I'm not so sure. I've heard strange stories. There was a man I met once in Oman, who went west from the Manah oasis . . ."

He stopped to taste the club madeira, then set down the glass and looked at his watch.

"Great Scott!" he said. "I must be off. I'm sorry, Mr. President, but I felt I must see you all again. You don't mind my butting in?"

He was halfway to the door, when Burminster asked where he was going.

"To seek the straw in some sequestered grange. . . . Meaning the ten-thirty from King's Cross. I'm off to Scotland to see my father. Remember, I'm the last prop of an ancient house. Good-bye, all of you. I'll tell you about my schemes at the next dinner."

As the door closed on him I had a sense of the blackest depression and utter loneliness. He was my one great ally, and he came and disappeared like a ship in the night, without a word to me. I felt like a blind bat, and I must have showed my feeling in my face, for Medina saw it and

put it down, I daresay, to my dislike of Sandy. He asked Palliser-Yeates to take his place. "It's not the Scotch express, like Arbuthnot, but I'm off for a holiday very soon, and I have an appointment I must keep." That was all to the good, for I had been wondering how I was to make an excuse for my visit to the Fields of Eden. He asked me when I would be back, and I said listlessly within the next hour. He nodded. "I'll be home by then, and can let you in if Odell has gone to bed." Then with a little chaff of Burminster he left, so much at ease that I was positive he had had no bad news. I waited for five minutes and followed suit. The time was a quarter past ten.

At the entrance to the Club in Wellesley Street I expected to have some difficulty, but the man in the box at the head of the stairs, after a sharp glance at me, let me pass. He was not the fellow who had been there on my visit with Archie Roylance and yet I had a queer sense of having seen his face before. I stepped into the dancing-room with its heavy flavour of scent and its infernal din of mountebank music, sat down at a side table and ordered a liqueur.

There was a difference in the place, but at first I could not put my finger on it. Everything seemed the same; the only face I knew was Miss Victor's, and that had the same mask-like pallor; she was dancing with a boy, who seemed to be trying to talk to her and getting few replies. Odell I did not see, nor the Jew with the beard. I observed with interest the little casement above from which I had looked when I burgled the curiosity shop. There were fewer people to-night, but apparently the same class.

No, not quite the same class. The women were the same, but the men were different. They were older and more — how shall I put it? — responsible-looking, and had not the air of the professional dancing partner or the young man on the spree. They were heavier footed, too, though good enough performers. Somehow I got the notion that most of them were not habitués of this kind of place and were here with a purpose.

As soon as this idea dawned on me I began to notice other things. There were fewer foreign waiters, and their number was steadily decreasing. Drinks would be ordered and would be long in coming; a servant, once he left the hall, seemed to be unaccountably detained. And then I observed another thing. There was a face looking down from the casement above; I could see it like a shadow behind the dirty glass.

Presently Odell appeared, a resplendent figure in evening dress, with a diamond solitaire in his shirt and a red silk handkerchief in his left sleeve. He looked massive and formidable, but puffier than ever, and his small pig's eyes were very bright. I fancied he had been having a glass or two, just enough to excite him. He swaggered about among the small tables, turning now and then to stare at the girl in green, and then went out again. I looked at my watch, and saw that it was a quarter to eleven.

When I lifted my head Mary had arrived. No more paint and powder and bizarre clothes. She was wearing the pale blue gown she had worn at our Hunt Ball in March, and her hair was dressed in the simple way I loved, which showed all the lights and shadows in the gold. She came in like a young queen, cast a swift glance round the room, and then, shading her eyes with her hand, looked

up towards the casement. It must have been a signal, for I saw a hand wave.

As she stood there, very still and poised like a runner, the music stopped suddenly. The few men who were still dancing spoke to their partners and moved towards the door. I observed the bearded Jew hurry in and look round. A man touched him on the arm and drew him away, and that was the last I saw of him.

Suddenly Odell reappeared. He must have had some warning which required instant action. I shall never know what it was, but it may have announced the round-up, and the course to be followed towards the hostages. He signed peremptorily to Miss Victor and went forward as if to take her arm. "You gotta come along," I heard, when my eyes were occupied with a new figure.

Turpin was there, a pale taut young man with his brows knit, as I remembered them in tight corners in France. The green girl had darted to Mary's side, and Turpin strode up to her.

"Adela, my dear," he said, "I think it is time for you to be going home."

The next I saw was Miss Victor's hand clutching his arm and Odell advancing with a flush on his sallow face.

"You letta go that goil," he was saying. "You got no business with her. She's my goil."

Turpin was smiling. "I think not, my friend." He disengaged Adela's arm and put her behind him, and with a swift step struck Odell a resounding smack on the cheek with the flat of his hand.

The man seemed to swell with fury. "Hell," he cried, with a torrent of Bowery oaths. "My smart guy, I've got something in my mitt for you. You for the sleep pill."

I would have given a fortune to be in Turpin's place,

for I felt that a scrap was what I needed to knit up my ragged nerves. But I couldn't chip in, for this was clearly his special quarrel, and very soon I saw that he was not likely to need my help.

Smiling wickedly, he moved round the pug, who had his fists up. "*Fiche-moi la paix*," he crooned. "My friend, I am going to massacre you."

I stepped towards Mary, for I wanted to get the women outside, but she was busy attending to Miss Victor, whom the strain of the evening had left on the verge of swooning. So I only saw bits of the fight. Turpin kept Odell at long range, for in-fighting would have been fatal, and he tired him with his lightning movements, till the professional's bad training told and his wind went. When the Frenchman saw his opponent puffing and his cheeks mottling he started to sail in. That part I witnessed, and I hope that Mary and Miss Victor did not understand old Turpin's language, for he spoke gently to himself the whole time, and it was the quintessence of all the esoteric abuse that the French *poilu* accumulated during the four years of war. His tremendous reach gave him an advantage, he was as light on his legs as a fencer, and his arms seemed to shoot out with the force of a steam-hammer. I realised what I had never known before, that his slimness was deceptive, and that stripped he would be a fine figure of sinew and bone. Also I understood that a big fellow, however formidable, if he is untrained and a little drunk, will go down before speed and quick wits and the deftness of youth.

They fought for just over six minutes. Turpin's deadliest blows were on Odell's body, but the knockout came with one on the point of the chin. The big man crumpled up in a heap, and the back of his head banged on the floor.

Turpin wrapped a wisp of a handkerchief round his knuckles, which had suffered from Odell's solitaire, and looked about him.

"What is to become of this offal?" he asked.

One of the dancers replied. "We will look after him, sir. The whole house is in our hands. This man is wanted on a good many grounds."

I walked up to the prostrate Odell, and took the latch-key from his waistcoat pocket. Turpin and Adela had gone, and Mary stood watching me. I observed that she was very pale.

"I am going to Hill Street," I said.

"I will come later," was her answer. "I hope in less than an hour. The key will let you in. There will be people there to keep the door open for me."

Her face had the alert and absorbed look that old Peter Pienaar's used to have when he was after big game. There was no other word spoken between us. She entered a big saloon-car which was waiting in the street below, and I walked to Royston Square to find a taxi. It was not yet eleven o'clock.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NIGHT OF THE FIRST OF JUNE — LATER

A LITTLE after eleven that night a late walker in Palmyra Square would have seen a phenomenon rare in the dingy neighbourhood. A large motor-car drew up at the gate of Number 7, where dwelt the teacher of music who had long retired to rest. A woman descended, wearing a dark cloak and carrying a parcel, and stood for a second looking across the road to where the lean elms in the centre of the square made a patch of shade. She seemed to find there what she expected, for she hastened to the gate of Number 4. She did not approach the front door, but ran down the path to the back where the tradesmen called, and as soon as she was out of sight several figures emerged from the shadow and moved towards the gate.

Miss Outhwaite opened to her tap. "My, but you're late, miss," she whispered, as the woman brushed past her into the dim kitchen. Then she gasped, for some transformation had taken place in the district visitor. It was no longer a faded spinster that she saw, but a dazzling lady, gorgeously dressed as it seemed to her, and of a remarkable beauty.

"I've brought your hat, Elsie," she said. "It's rather a nice one, and I think you'll like it. Now go at once and open the front door."

"But Madame . . ." the girl gasped.

"Never mind Madame. You are done with Madame. To-morrow you will come and see me at this address,"

and she gave her a slip of paper. "I will see that you do not suffer. Now hurry, my dear."

The girl seemed to be mesmerised, and turned to obey. The district visitor followed her, but did not wait in the hall. Instead, she ran lightly up the stairs, guiding herself by a small electric torch, and when the front door was open and four silent figures had entered she was nowhere to be seen.

For the next quarter of an hour an inquisitive passer-by would have noted lights spring out and then die away in more than one room of Number 4. He might have also heard the sound of low excited speech. At the end of that space of time he would have seen the district visitor descend the steps and enter the big car which had moved up to the gate. She was carrying something in her arms.

Within, in a back room, a furious woman was struggling with a telephone, from which she got no answer, since the line had been cut. And an old woman sat in a chair by the hearth, raving and muttering, with a face like death.

When I got to Hill Street, I waited till the taxi had driven off before I entered. There was a man standing in the porch of the house opposite, and as I waited another passed me, who nodded. "Good evening, Sir Richard," he said, and though I did not recognise him I knew where he came from. My spirits were at their lowest ebb, and not even the sight of these arrangements could revive them. For I knew that, though we had succeeded with Miss Victor and Mercot, we had failed with the case which mattered most. I was going to try to scare Medina or to buy him, and I felt that both purposes were futile, for the awe of him was still like a black fog on my soul.

I let myself in with Odell's latch-key and left the heavy

door ajar. Then I switched on the staircase lights and mounted to the library. I left the lights burning behind me, for they would be needed by those who followed.

Medina was standing by the fireplace, in which logs had been laid ready for a match. As usual, he had only the one lamp lit, that on his writing-table. He had a slip of paper in his hand, one of the two which had lain in the top drawer, as I saw by the dates and the ruled lines. I fancy he had been attempting in vain to ring up Palmyra Square. Some acute suspicion had been aroused in him, and he had been trying to take action. His air of leisure was the kind which is hastily assumed; a minute before I was convinced he had been furiously busy.

There was surprise in his face when he saw me.

"Hullo!" he said, "how did you get in? I didn't hear you ring. I told Odell to go to bed."

I was feeling so weak and listless that I wanted to sit down, so I dropped into a chair out of the circle of the lamp.

"Yes," I said. "Odell's in bed all right. I let myself in with his key. I've just seen that Bowery tough put to sleep with a crack on the chin from Turpin. You know — the Marquis de la Tour du Pin."

I had a good strategic position, for I could see his face clearly and he could only see the outline of mine.

"What on earth are you talking about?" he said.

"Odell has been knocked out. You see, Turpin has taken Miss Victor back to her father." I looked at my watch. "And by this time Lord Mercot should be in London — unless the Scotch express is late."

A great tide of disillusion must have swept over his mind, but his face gave no sign of it. It had grown stern, but as composed as a judge's.

"You're behaving as if you were mad. What has come over you? I know nothing of Lord Mercot — you mean the Alcester boy? Or Miss Victor."

"Oh yes, you do," I said wearily. I did not know where to begin, for I wanted to get him at once to the real business. "It's a long story. Do you want me to tell it when you know it all already?" I believe I yawned and I felt so tired I could hardly put the sentences together.

"I insist that you explain this nonsense," was his reply. One thing he must have realised by now, that he had no power over me, for his jaw was set and his eyes stern, as if he were regarding not a satellite, but an enemy and an equal.

"Well, you and your friends for your own purposes took three hostages, and I have made it my business to free them. I let you believe that your tomfoolery had mastered me — your performance in this room and Newhover and Madame Breda and the old blind lady and all the rest of it. When you thought I was drugged and demented I was specially wide awake. I had to abuse your hospitality — rather a dirty game, you may say, but then I was dealing with a scoundrel. I went to Norway when you thought I was in bed at Fosse, and I found Mercot, and I expect at this moment Newhover is feeling rather cheap. . . . Miss Victor, too. She wasn't very difficult, once we hit on the Fields of Eden. You're a very clever man, Mr. Medina, but you oughtn't to circulate doggerel verses. Take my advice and stick to good poetry."

By this time the situation must have been clear to him, but there was not a quiver in that set hard face. I take off my hat to the best actor I have ever met — the best but one, the German count who lies buried at the farm of Gavrelle.

"You've gone off your head," he said, and his quiet considerate voice belied his eyes.

"Oh no! I rather wish I had. I hate to think that there can be so base a thing in the world as you. A man with the brains of a god and living only to glut his rotten vanity! You should be scotched like a snake."

For a moment I had a blessed thought that he was about to go for me, for I would have welcomed a scrap like nothing else on earth. There may have been a flicker of passion, but it was quickly suppressed. His eyes had become grave and reproachful.

"I have been kind to you," he said, "and have treated you as a friend. This is my reward. The most charitable explanation is that your wits are unhinged. But you had better leave this house."

"Not before you hear me out. I have something to propose, Mr. Medina. You have still a third hostage in your hands. We are perfectly aware of the syndicate you have been working with — the Barcelona nut business, and the Jacobite count, and your friend the Shropshire master-of-hounds. Scotland Yard has had its hand over the lot for months, and to-night the hand will be closed. That shop is shut for good. Now listen to me, for I have a proposal to make. You have the ambition of the devil, and have already made for yourself a great name. I will do nothing to smirch that name. I will swear a solemn oath to hold my tongue. I will go away from England, if you like. I will bury the memory of the past months, and my knowledge will never be used to put a spoke in your wheel. Also, since your syndicate is burst up, you will want money. Well, I will give you one hundred thousand pounds. And in return for my silence and my cash I ask you to restore to me David Warcliff, safe and sane. Sane,

I say, for whatever you have made of the poor little chap you have got to unmake it."

I had made up my mind about this offer as I came along in the taxi. It was a big sum, but I had more money than I needed, and Blenkiron, who had millions, would lend a hand.

His face showed no response, no interest, only the same stern melancholy regard.

"Poor devil!" he said. "You're madder than I thought."

My lassitude was disappearing, and I began to get angry.

"If you do not agree," I said, "I will blacken your reputation throughout the civilised world. What use will England have for a kidnapper and a blackmailer and — a — a — bogus magician?"

But as I spoke I knew that my threats were foolish. He smiled, a wise, pitying smile, which made me shiver with wrath.

"No, it is you who will appear as the blackmailer," he said softly. "Consider. You are making the most outrageous charges. I don't quite follow your meaning, but clearly they are outrageous — and what evidence have you to support them? Your own dreams. Who will believe you? I have had the good fortune to make many friends, and they are loyal friends." There was a gentle regret in his voice. "Your story will be laughed to scorn. Of course people will be sorry for you, for you are popular in a way. They will say that a meritorious soldier, more notable perhaps for courage than for brains, has gone crazy, and they will comment on the long-drawn-out effects of the War. I must of course protect myself. If you blackguard me I will prosecute you for slander and get your mental condition examined."

It was only too true. I had no evidence except my own word. I knew that it would be impossible to link up Medina with the doings of the syndicate — he was too clever for that. His blind mother would die on the rack before she spoke, and his tools could not give him away, because they were tools and knew nothing. The world would laugh at me if I opened my mouth. At that moment I think I had my first full realisation of Medina's quality. Here was a man who had just learned that his pet schemes were shattered, who had had his vanity wounded to the quick by the revelation of how I had fooled him, and yet he could play what was left of the game with coolness and precision. I had struck the largest size of opponent.

"What about the hundred thousand pounds, then?" I asked. "That is my offer for David Warcliff."

"You are very good," he said mockingly. "I might feel insulted, if I did not know you were a lunatic."

I sat there staring at the figure in the glow of the one lamp, which seemed to wax more formidable as I looked, and a thousandfold more sinister. I saw the hideous roundness of his head, the mercilessness of his eyes, so that I wondered how I had ever thought him handsome. But now that most of his game was spoiled he only seemed the greater, the more assured. Were there no gaps in his defences? He had kinks in him — witness the silly rhyme which had given me the first clue. . . . Was there no weakness in that panoply which I could use? Physical fear — physical pain — could anything be done with that?

I got to my feet with a blind notion of closing with him. He divined my intention, for he showed something in his hand which gleamed dully. "Take care," he said. "I can defend myself against any maniac."

"Put it away," I said hopelessly. "You're safe enough from me. My God, I hope that somewhere there is a hell." I felt as feeble as a babe, and all the while the thought of the little boy was driving me mad.

Suddenly I saw Medina's eyes look over my shoulder. Some one had come into the room, and I turned and found Kharâma.

He was in evening dress, wearing a turban, and in the dusk his dark malign face seemed an embodied sneer at my helplessness. I did not see how Medina took his arrival, for all at once something seemed to give in my head. For the Indian I felt now none of the awe which I had for the other, only a flaming, overpowering hate. That this foul thing out of the East should pursue his devilries unchecked seemed to me beyond bearing. I forgot Medina's pistol and everything else, and went for him like a wild beast.

He dodged me, and, before I knew, had pulled off his turban, and tossed it in my face.

"Don't be an old ass, Dick," he said.

Panting with fury, I stopped short and stared. The voice was Sandy's, and so was the figure. . . . And the face, too, when I came to look into it. He had done something with the corners of his eyebrows and tinted the lids with kohl, but the eyes, which I had never before seen properly opened, were those of my friend.

"What an artist the world has lost in me!" he laughed, and tried to tidy his disordered hair.

Then he nodded to Medina. "We meet again sooner than we expected. I missed my train, and came to look for Dick. . . . Lay down that pistol, please. I happen to be armed too, you see. It's no case for shooting anyhow. Do you mind if I smoke?"

He flung himself into an armchair and lit a cigarette. Once more I was conscious of my surroundings, for hitherto for all I knew I might have been arguing in a desert. My eyes had cleared and my brain was beginning to work again. I saw the great room with its tiers of books, some glimmering, some dusky; Sandy taking his ease in his chair and gazing placidly up into Medina's face; Medina with his jaw set but his eyes troubled — yes, for the first time I saw flickers of perplexity in those eyes.

"Dick, I suppose, has been reasoning with you," Sandy said mildly. "And you have told him that he was a madman? Quite right. He is. You have pointed out to him that his story rests on his unsupported evidence, which no one will believe, for I admit it is an incredible tale. You have warned him that if he opens his mouth you will have him shut up as a lunatic. Is that correct, Dick?"

"Well," he continued, looking blandly at Medina, "that was a natural view for you to take. Only, of course, you made one small error. His evidence will not be unsupported."

Medina laughed, but there was no ease in his laugh. "Who are the other lunatics?"

"Myself for one. You have interested me for quite a long time, Mr. Medina. I will confess that one of my reasons for coming home in March was to have the privilege of your acquaintance. I have taken a good deal of pains about it. I have followed your own line of studies — indeed, if the present situation weren't so hectic, I should like to exchange notes with you as a fellow-inquirer. I have traced your career in Central Asia and elsewhere with some precision. I think I know more about you than anybody else in the world."

Medina made no answer. The tables were turning, and

his eyes were chained to the slight figure in the armchair.

"All that is very interesting," Sandy went on, "but it is not quite germane to the subject before us. Kharáma, whom we both remember in his pride, unfortunately died last year. It was kept very secret for obvious reasons — the goodwill of his business was very valuable and depended upon his being alive — and I only heard of it by a lucky accident. So I took the liberty of borrowing his name, Mr. Medina. As Kharáma I was honoured with your confidence. Rather a cad's trick, you will say, and I agree, but in an affair like this one has no choice of weapons. . . . You did more than confide in me. You trusted me with Miss Victor and the Marquis de la Tour du Pin, when it was important that they should be in safe keeping. . . . I have a good deal of evidence to support Dick."

"Moonshine!" said Medina. "Two lunacies do not make sense. I deny every detail of your rubbish."

"Out of the mouth of two or three witnesses," said Sandy pleasantly. "There is still a third . . . Lavater," he cried, "come in, we're ready for you."

There entered the grey melancholy man, whom I had seen on my first visit here, and in the house behind Little Fardell Street. I noticed that he walked straight to Sandy's chair, and did not look at Medina.

"Lavater you know already, I think. He used to be a friend of mine, and lately we have resumed the friendship. He was your disciple for some time, but has now relinquished that honour. Lavater will be able to tell the world a good deal about you."

Medina's face had become like a mask, and the colour had gone out of it. He may have been a volcano within, but outside he was cold ice. His voice, acid and sneering, came out like drops of chilly water.

"Three lunatics," he said. "I deny every word you say. No one will believe you. It is a conspiracy of madmen."

"Let's talk business anyhow," said Sandy. "The case against you is proven to the hilt, but let us see how the world will regard it. The strong point on your side is that people don't like to confess they have been fools. You have been a very popular man, Mr. Medina, and your many friends will be loath to believe that you are a scoundrel. You've the hedge of your reputation to protect you. Again, our story is so monstrous that the ordinary Englishman may call it unbelievable, for we are not an imaginative nation. Again, we can get no help from the principal sufferers. Miss Victor and Lord Mercot can tell an ugly story of kidnapping, which may get a life-sentence for Odell, and for Newhover if he is caught, but which does not implicate you. That will be a stumbling-block to most juries, who are not as familiar with occult science as you and I. . . . These are your strong points. But consider what we can bring on the other side. You are a propagandist of genius, as I once told Dick, and I can explain just how you have fooled the world — your exploits with Denikin and such-like. Then the three of us can tell a damning story, and tell it from close quarters. It may sound wild, but Dick has some reputation for good sense, and a good many people think that I am not altogether a fool. Finally we have on our side Scotland Yard, which is now gathering in your associates, and we have behind us Julius Victor, who is not without influence. . . . I do not say we can send you to prison, though I think it likely, but we can throw such suspicion on you that for the rest of your days you will be a marked man. You will recognise that for you that means utter failure, for to succeed you must swim in the glory of popular confidence."

I could see that Medina was shaken at last. "You may damage me with your lies," he said slowly, "but I will be even with you. You will find me hard to beat."

"I don't doubt it," was Sandy's answer. "I and my friends do not want victory, we want success. We want David Warcliff."

There was no answer, and Sandy went on.

"We make you a proposal. The three of us will keep what we know to ourselves. We will pledge ourselves never to breathe a word of it — if you like we will sign a document to say that we acknowledge our mistake. So far as we are concerned you may go on and become Prime Minister of Britain or Archbishop of Canterbury, or anything you jolly well like. We don't exactly love you, but we will not interfere with the adoration of others. I'll take myself off again to the East with Lavater, and Dick will bury himself in Oxfordshire mud. And in return we ask that you hand over to us David Warcliff in his right mind."

There was no answer.

Then Sandy made a mistake in tactics. "I believe you are attached to your mother," he said. "If you accept our offer she will be safe from annoyance. Otherwise — well, she is an important witness."

The man's pride was stung to the quick. His mother must have been for him an inner sanctuary, a thing apart from and holier than his fiercest ambitions, the very core and shrine of his monstrous vanity. That she should be used as a bargaining counter stirred something deep and primeval in him, something — let me say it — higher and better than I had imagined. A new and a human fury burned the mask off him like tissue paper.

"You fools!" he cried, and his voice was harsh with

rage. "You perfect fools! You will sweat blood for that insult."

"It's a fair offer," said Sandy, never moving a muscle. "Do I understand that you refuse?"

Medina stood on the hearth-rug like an animal at bay, and upon my soul I couldn't but admire him. The flame in his face would have scorched most people into abject fear.

"Go to hell, the pack of you! Out of this house! You will never hear a word from me till you are bleating for mercy. Get out . . ."

His eyes must have been dimmed by his rage, for he did not see Mary enter. She had advanced right up to Sandy's chair before even I noticed her. She was carrying something in her arms, something which she held close as a mother holds a child.

It was the queer little girl from the house in Palmyra Square. Her hair had grown longer and fell in wisps over her brow and her pale tear-stained cheeks. A most piteous little object she was, with dull blind eyes which seemed to struggle with perpetual terror. She still wore the absurd linen smock, her skinny little legs and arms were bare, and her thin fingers clutched at Mary's gown.

Then Medina saw her, and Sandy ceased to exist for him. He stared for a second uncomprehendingly, till the passion in his face turned to alarm. "What have you done with her?" he barked and flung himself forward.

I thought he was going to attack Mary, so I tripped him up. He sprawled on the floor, and since he seemed to have lost all command of himself I reckoned that I had better keep him there. I looked towards Mary, who nodded. "Please tie him up," she said, and passed me the turban cloth of the late Kharâma.

He fought like a tiger, but Lavater and I with a little help from Sandy managed to truss him fairly tight, supplementing the turban with one of the curtain cords. We laid him in an armchair.

"What have you done with her?" he kept on, screwing his head round to look at Mary.

I could not understand his maniacal concern for the little girl, till Mary answered, and I saw what he meant by "her."

"No one has touched your mother. She is in the house in Palmyra Square."

Then Mary laid the child down very gently in the chair where Sandy had been sitting, and stood erect before Medina.

"I want you to bring back this little boy's mind," she said.

I suppose I should have been astonished, but I wasn't — at least not at her words, though I had not had an inkling beforehand of the truth. All the astonishment I was capable of was reserved for Mary. She stood there looking down on the bound man, her face very pale, her eyes quite gentle, her lips parted as if in expectation. And yet there was something about her so formidable, so implacable, that the other three of us fell into the background. Her presence dominated everything, and the very grace of her body and the mild sadness of her eyes seemed to make her the more terrifying. I know now how Joan of Arc must have looked when she led her troops into battle.

"Do you hear me?" she repeated. "You took away his soul and you can give it back again. That is all I ask of you."

He choked before he replied. "What boy? I tell you I know nothing. You are all mad."

"I mean David Warcliff. The others are free now, and he must be free to-night. Free, and in his right mind, as when you carried him off. Surely you understand."

There was no answer.

"That is all I ask. It is such a little thing. Then we will go away."

I broke in. "Our offer holds. Do as she asks, and we will never open our mouths about to-night's work."

He was not listening to me, nor was she. It was a duel between the two of them, and as she looked at him, his face seemed to grow more dogged and stone-like. If ever he had felt hatred it was for this woman, for it was a conflict between two opposite poles of life, two worlds eternally at war.

"I tell you I know nothing of the brat . . ."

She stopped him with lifted hand. "Oh, do not let us waste time, please. It is far too late for arguing. If you do what I ask we will go away, and you will never be troubled with us again. I promise — we all promise. If you do not, of course we must ruin you."

I think it was the confidence in her tone which stung him.

"I refuse," he almost screamed. "I do not know what you mean . . . I defy you. . . . You can proclaim your lies to the world. . . . You will not crush me. I am too strong for you."

There was no mistaking the finality of that defiance. I thought it put the lid on everything. We could blast the fellow's reputation no doubt, and win victory; but we had failed, for we were left with that poor little mindless waif.

Mary's face did not change.

"If you refuse, I must try another way"; her voice was

as gentle as a mother's. "I must give David Warcliff back to his father. . . . Dick," she turned to me, "will you light the fire."

I obeyed, not knowing what she meant, and in a minute the dry faggots were roaring up the chimney, lighting up our five faces and the mazed child in the chair.

"You have destroyed a soul," she said, "and you refuse to repair the wrong. I am going to destroy your body, and nothing will ever repair it."

Then I saw her meaning, and both Sandy and I cried out. Neither of us had led the kind of life which makes a man squeamish, but this was too much for us. But our protests died half-born, after one glance at Mary's face. She was my own wedded wife, but in that moment I could no more have opposed her than could the poor bemused child. Her spirit seemed to transcend us all and radiate an inexorable command. She stood easily and gracefully, a figure of motherhood and pity rather than of awe. But all the same I did not recognise her; it was a stranger that stood there, a stern goddess that wielded the lightnings. Beyond doubt she meant every word she said, and her quiet voice seemed to deliver judgment as aloof and impersonal as Fate. I could see creeping over Medina's sullenness the shadow of terror.

"You are a desperate man," she was saying. "But I am far more desperate. There is nothing on earth that can stand between me and the saving of this child. You know that, don't you? A body for a soul — a soul for a body — which shall it be?"

The light was reflected from the steel fire-irons, and Medina saw it and shivered.

"You may live a long time, but you will have to live in seclusion. No woman will ever cast eyes on you except to

shudder. People will point at you and say 'There goes the man who was maimed by a woman — to save the soul of a child.' You will carry your story written on your face for the world to read and laugh and revile."

She had got at the central nerve of his vanity, for I think that he was ambitious less of achievement than of the personal glory that attends it. I dared not look at her, but I could look at him, and I saw all the passions of hell chase each other over his face. He tried to speak, but only choked. He seemed to bend his whole soul to look at her, and to shiver at what he saw.

She turned her head to glance at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"You must decide before the quarter strikes," she said. "After that there will be no place for repentance. A body for a soul — a soul for a body."

Then from her black silk reticule she took a little oddly-shaped green bottle. She held it in her hand as if it had been a jewel, and I gulped in horror.

"This is the elixir of death — of death in life, Mr. Medina. It makes comeliness a mockery. It will burn flesh and bone into shapes of hideousness, but it does not kill. Oh no — it does not kill. A body for a soul — a soul for a body."

It was that, I think, which finished him. The threefold chime which announced the quarter had begun when out of his dry throat came a sound like a clucking hen's. "I agree," a voice croaked, seeming to come from without, so queer and far away it was.

"Thank you," she said, as if some one had opened a door for her. "Dick, will you please make Mr. Medina more comfortable. . . ."

The fire was not replenished, so the quick-burning fag-

gots soon died down. Again the room was shadowy, except for the single lamp that glowed behind Medina's head.

I cannot describe that last scene, for I do not think my sight was clear, and I know that my head was spinning. The child sat on Mary's lap, with its eyes held by the glow of light. "You are Gerda . . . you are sleepy . . . now you sleep" — I did not heed the patter, for I was trying to think of homely things which would keep my wits anchored. I thought chiefly of Peter John.

Sandy was crouched on a stool by the hearth. I noticed that he had his hands on his knees, and that from one of them protruded something round and dark, like the point of a pistol barrel. He was taking no chances, but the thing was folly, for we were in the presence of far more potent weapons. Never since the world began was there a scene of such utter humiliation. I shivered at the indecency of it. Medina performed his sinister ritual, but on us spectators it had no more effect than a charade. Mary especially sat watching it with the detachment with which one watches a kindergarten play. The man had suddenly become a mountebank under those fearless eyes.

The voices droned on, the man asking questions, the child answering in a weak unnatural voice. "You are David Warcliff . . . you lost your way coming from school . . . you have been ill and have forgotten. . . . You are better now . . . you remember Haverham and the redshanks down by the river. . . . You are sleepy . . . I think you would like to sleep again."

Medina spoke. "You can wake him now. Do it carefully."

I got up and switched on the rest of the lights. The child was peacefully asleep in Mary's arms, and she bent and kissed him. "Speak to him, Dick," she said.

“Davie,” I said loudly. “Davie, it’s about time for us to get home.”

He opened his eyes and sat up. When he found himself on Mary’s knee, he began to clamber down. He was not accustomed to a woman’s lap, and felt a little ashamed.

“Davie,” I repeated. “Your father will be getting tired waiting for us. Don’t you think we should go home?”

“Yes, sir,” he said, and put his hand in mine.

To my dying day I shall not forget my last sight of that library — the blazing lights which made the books, which I had never seen before except in shadow, gleam like a silk tapestry, the wood-fire dying on the hearth, and the man sunk in the chair. It may sound odd after all that had happened, but my chief feeling was pity. Yes, pity! He seemed the loneliest thing on God’s earth. You see he had never had any friends except himself, and his ambitions had made a barrier between him and all humanity. Now that they were gone he was stripped naked, and left cold and shivering in the arctic wilderness of his broken dreams.

Mary leaned back in the car.

“I hope I’m not going to faint,” she said. “Give me the green bottle, please.”

“For Heaven’s sake!” I cried.

“Silly!” she said. “It’s only eau-de-cologne.”

She laughed, and the laugh seemed to restore her a little, though she still looked deadly pale. She fumbled in her reticule, and drew out a robust pair of scissors.

“I’m going to cut Davie’s hair. I can’t change his clothes, but at any rate I can make his head like a boy’s again, so that his father won’t be shocked.”

“Does he know we are coming?”

"Yes. I telephoned to him after dinner, but of course I said nothing about Davie."

She clipped assiduously, and by the time we came to the Pimlico square where Sir Arthur Warcliff lived she had got rid of the long locks, and the head was now that of a pallid and thin but wonderfully composed little boy. "Am I going back to Dad?" he had asked, and seemed content.

I refused to go in — I was not fit for any more shocks — so I sat in the car while Mary and David entered the little house. In about three minutes Mary returned. She was crying, and yet smiling too.

"I made Davie wait in the hall, and went into Sir Arthur's study alone. He looked ill — and oh, so old and worn. I said: 'I have brought Davie. Never mind his clothes. He's all right!' Then I fetched him in. Oh, Dick, it was a miracle. That old darling seemed to come back to life. . . . The two didn't run into each other's arms . . . they shook hands . . . and the little boy bowed his head and Sir Arthur kissed the top of it, and said 'Dear Mouse-head, you've come back to me.' . . . And then I slipped away."

There was another scene that night in which I played a part, for we finished at Carlton House Terrace. Of what happened there I have only a confused recollection. I remember Julius Victor kissing Mary's hand, and the Duke shaking mine as if he would never stop. I remember Mercot, who looked uncommonly fit and handsome, toasting me in champagne, and Adela Victor sitting at a piano and singing to us divinely. But my chief memory is of a French nobleman and a distinguished German engineer kicking their heels together in an extemporised dance of joy.

CHAPTER XX

MACHRAY

A WEEK later, after much consultation with Sandy, I wrote Medina a letter. The papers said he had gone abroad for a short rest, and I could imagine the kind of mental purgatory he was enduring in some Mediterranean bay. We had made up our mind to be content with success. Victory meant a long campaign in the courts and the press, in which no doubt we should have won, but for which I at any rate had no stomach. The whole business was a nightmare which I longed to shut the door on; we had drawn his fangs, and for all I cared he might go on with his politics and dazzle the world with his gifts, provided he kept his hands out of crime. I wrote and told him that; told him that the three people who knew everything would hold their tongues, but that they reserved the right to speak if he ever showed any sign of running crooked. I had no reply and did not expect one. I had lost all my hate for the man, and, so strangely are we made, what I mostly felt was compassion. We are all, even the best of us, egotists and self-deceivers, and without a little comfortable make-believe to clothe us we should freeze in the outer winds. I shuddered when I thought of the poor devil with his palace of cards about his ears and his naked soul. I felt that further triumph would be an offence against humanity.

He must have got my message, for in July he was back at his work, and made a speech at a big political demon-

stration which was highly commended in the papers. Whether he went about in society I do not know, for Sandy was in Scotland and I was at Fosse, and not inclined to leave it. . . . Meantime Macgillivray's business was going on, and the Press was full of strange cases, which no one seemed to think of connecting. I gathered from Macgillivray that though the syndicate was smashed to little bits he had failed to make the complete bag of malefactors that he had hoped. In England there were three big financial exposures followed by long sentences; in Paris there was a first-rate political scandal and a crop of convictions; a labour agitator and a copper magnate in the Middle West went to gaol for life, and there was the famous rounding-up of the murder gang in Turin. But Macgillivray and his colleagues, like me, had success rather than victory; indeed in this world I don't think you can get both at once — you must make your choice.

We saw Mercot at the "House" Ball at Oxford, none the worse for his adventures, but rather the better, for he was a man now and not a light-witted boy. Early in July Mary and I went to Paris for Adela Victor's wedding, the most gorgeous show I have ever witnessed, when I had the privilege of kissing the bride and being kissed by the bridegroom. Sir Arthur Warcliff brought David to pay us a visit at Fosse, where the boy fished from dawn to dusk, and began to get some flesh on his bones. Archie Roylance arrived and the pair took such a fancy to each other that the three of them went off to Norway to have a look at the birds on Flacksholm.

I was busy during those weeks making up arrears of time at Fosse, for my long absence had put out the whole summer programme. One day, as I was down in the Home Meadow, planning a new outlet for one of the ponds.

Sandy turned up, announcing that he must have a talk with me and could only spare twenty minutes.

"When does your tenancy of Machray begin?" he asked.

"I have got it now — ever since April. The sea-trout come early there."

"And you can go up whenever you like?"

"Yes. We propose starting about the 5th of August."

"Take my advice and start at once," he said.

I asked why, though I guessed his reason.

"Because I'm not very happy about you here. You've insulted to the marrow the vainest and one of the cleverest men in the world. Don't imagine he'll take it lying down. You may be sure he is spending sleepless nights planning how he is to get even with you. It's you he is chiefly thinking about. Me he regards as a rival in the same line of business — he'd love to break me, but he'll trust to luck for the chance turning up. Lavater has been his slave and has escaped — but at any rate he once acknowledged his power. *You* have fooled him from start to finish and left his vanity one raw throbbing sore. He won't be at ease till he has had his revenge on you — on you and your wife."

"Peter John!" I exclaimed.

He shook his head. "No, I don't think so. He won't try that line again — at any rate not yet awhile. But he would be much happier, Dick, if you were dead."

The thought had been in my own mind for weeks, and had made me pretty uncomfortable. It is not pleasant to walk in peril of your life, and move about in constant expectation of your decease. I had considered the thing very carefully, and had come to the conclusion that I could do nothing but try to forget the risk. If I ever

allowed myself to think about it, my whole existence would be poisoned. It was a most unpleasant affair, but after all the world is full of hazards. I told Sandy that.

"I'm quite aware of the danger," I said. "I always reckoned that as part of the price I had to pay for succeeding. But I'm hanged if I'm going to allow the fellow to score off me to the extent of disarranging my life."

"You've plenty of fortitude, old fellow," said Sandy, "but you owe a duty to your family and your friends. Of course you might get police protection from Macgillivray, but that would be an infernal nuisance for you, and, besides, what kind of police protection would avail against an enemy as subtle as Medina? . . . No, I want you to go away. I want you to go to Machray now, and stay there till the end of October."

"What good would that do? He can follow me there, if he wants to, and anyhow the whole thing would begin again when I came back."

"I'm not so sure," he said. "In three months' time his wounded vanity may have healed. It's no part of his general game to have a vendetta with you, and only a passion of injured pride would drive him to it. Presently that must die down, and he will see his real interest. Then as for Machray — why a Scotch deer-forest is the best sanctuary on earth. Nobody can come up that long glen without your hearing about it, and nobody can move on the hills without half a dozen argus-eyed stalkers and gillies following him. They're the right sort of police protection. I want you for all our sakes to go to Machray at once."

"It looks like funking," I objected.

"Don't be an old ass. Is there any man alive, who is not a raving maniac, likely to doubt your courage? You

know perfectly well that it is sometimes a brave man's duty to run away."

I thought for a bit. "I don't think he'll hire ruffians to murder me," I said.

"Why?"

"Because he challenged me to a duel. Proposed a place in the Pyrenées and offered to let me choose both seconds."

"What did you reply?"

"I wired, 'Try not to be a fool.' It looks as if he wanted to keep the job of doing me in for himself."

"Very likely, and that doesn't mend matters. I'd rather face half a dozen cutthroats than Medina. What you tell me strengthens my argument."

I was bound to admit that Sandy talked sense, and after he had gone I thought the matter out and decided to take his advice. Somehow the fact that he should have put my suspicions into words made them more formidable, and I knew again the odious feeling of the hunted. It was hardly fear, for I think that, if necessary, I could have stayed on at Fosse and gone about my business with a stiff lip. But all the peace of the place had been spoiled. If a bullet might at any moment come from a covert — that was the crude way I envisaged the risk — then good-bye to the charm of my summer meadows.

The upshot was that I warned Tom Greenslade to be ready to take his holiday, and by the 20th of July he and I and Mary and Peter John were settled in a little white-washed lodge tucked into the fold of a birch-clad hill, and looking alternately at a shrunken river and a cloudless sky, while we prayed for rain.

Machray in calm weather is the most solitary place on earth, lonelier and quieter even than a Boer farm lost in

some hollow of the veld. The mountains rise so sheer and high, that it seems that only a bird could escape, and the road from the sea-loch ten miles away is only a strip of heather-grown sand which looks as if it would end a mile off at the feet of each steep hill-shoulder. But when the gales come, and the rain is lashing the roof, and the river swirls at the garden-edge, and the birches and rowans are tossing, then a thousand voices talk, and one lives in a world so loud that one's ears are deafened and one's voice acquires a sharp pitch of protest from shouting against the storm.

We had few gales, and the last week of July was a very fair imitation of the Tropics. The hills were cloaked in a heat haze, the Aicill river was a chain of translucent pools with a few reddening salmon below the ledges, the burns were thin trickles, the sun drew hot scents out of the heather and bog-myrtle, and movement was a weariness to man and beast. That was for the day-time; but every evening about five o'clock there would come a light wind from the west, which scattered the haze, and left a land swimming in cool amber light. Then Mary and Tom Greenslade and I would take to the hills, and return well on for midnight to a vast and shameless supper. Sometimes in the hot noontides I went alone, with old Angus the head stalker, and long before the season began I had got a pretty close knowledge of the forest.

The reader must bear with me while I explain the lie of the land. The twenty thousand acres of Machray extend on both sides of the Aicill glen, but principally to the south. West lies the Machray sea-loch, where the hills are low and green and mostly sheep-ground. East, up to the river-head, is Glenaicill Forest, the lodge of which is beyond the watershed on the shore of another sea-loch,

and on our side of the divide there is only a stalker's cottage. Glенаicill is an enormous place, far too big to be a single forest. It had been leased for years by Lord Glenfinnan, an uncle of Archie Roylance, but he was a frail old gentleman of over seventy who could only get a stag when they came down to the low ground in October. The result was that the place was ridiculously undershot, and all the western end, which adjoined Machray, was virtually a sanctuary. It was a confounded nuisance, for it made it impossible to stalk our northern beat except in a south-west wind, unless you wanted to shift the deer on to Glенаicill, and that beat had all our best grazing and seemed to attract all our best heads.

Haripol Forest to the south was not so large, but I should think it was the roughest ground in Scotland. Machray had good beats south of the Aicill right up to the watershed, and two noble corries, the Corrie-na-Sidhe and the Corrie Easain. Beyond the watershed was the glen of the Reascuill, both sides of which were Haripol ground. The Machray heights were all over the three thousand feet, but rounded and fairly easy going, but the Haripol peaks beyond the stream were desperate rock mountains — Stob Ban, Stob Coire Easain, Sgurr Mór — comprising some of the most difficult climbing in the British Isles. The biggest and hardest top of all was at the head of the Reascuill — Sgurr Dearg, with its two pinnacle ridges, its three prongs, and the awesome precipice of its eastern face. Machray marched with Haripol on its summit, but it wasn't often that any of our stalkers went that way. All that upper part of the Reascuill was a series of cliffs and chasms, and the red deer — who is no rock-climber — rarely ventured there. For the rest these four southern beats of ours were as delightful hunting-ground as I have

ever seen, and the ladies could follow a good deal of the stalking by means of a big telescope in the library window of the Lodge. Machray was a young man's forest, for the hills rose steep almost from the sea-level, and you might have to go up and down three thousand feet several times in a day. But Haripol — at least the north and east parts of it — was fit only for athletes, and it seemed to be its fate to fall to tenants who were utterly incapable of doing it justice. In recent years it had been leased successively to an elderly distiller, a young racing ne'er-do-weel who drank, and a plump American railway king. It was now in the hands of a certain middle-aged Midland manufacturer, Lord Claybody, who had won an easy fortune and an easier peerage during the War. "Ach, he will be killed," Angus said. "He will never get up a hundred feet of Haripol without being killed." So I found myself, to my disgust, afflicted with another unauthorised sanctuary.

Angus was very solemn about it. He was a lean anxious man, just over fifty, with a face not unlike a stag's, amazingly fast on the hills, a finished cragsman, and with all the Highlander's subtle courtesy. Kennedy, the second stalker, was of Lowland stock; his father had come to the North from Galloway in the days of the boom in sheep, and had remained as a keeper when sheep prices fell. He was a sturdy young fellow, apt to suffer on steep slopes on a warm day, but strong as an ox and with a better head than Angus for thinking out problems of weather and wind. Though he had the Gaelic, he was a true Lowlander, plain-spoken and imperturbable. It was a contrast of new and old, for Kennedy had served in the War, and learned many things beyond the other's ken. He knew, for example, how to direct your eye to the point he wanted, and would give intelligent directions like a bat-

tery observer, whereas with Angus it was always "D'ye see yon stone? Ay, but d'ye see another stone?" — and so forth. Kennedy, when we sat down to rest, would smoke a cigarette in a holder, while Angus lit the dottle in a foul old pipe.

In the first fortnight of August we had alternate days of rain, real drenching torrents, and the Aicill rose and let the fish up from the sea. There were few sea-trout that year, but there was a glorious run of salmon. Greenslade killed his first, and by the end of a week had a bag of twelve, while Mary, with the luck which seems to attend casual lady anglers, had four in one day to her own rod. Those were pleasant days, though there were mild damp afternoons when the midges were worse than tropical mosquitoes. I liked it best when a breeze rose and the sun was hot and we had all our meals by the waterside. Once at luncheon we took with us an iron pot, made a fire, and boiled a fresh-killed salmon "in his broo" — a device I recommend to any one who wants the full flavour of that noble fish.

Archie Roylance arrived on August 16th, full of the lust of hunting. He reported that they had seen nothing remarkable in the way of birds at Flacksholm, but that David Warcliff had had great sport with the sea-trout. "There's a good boy for you," he declared. "First-class little sportsman, and to see him and his father together made me want to get wedded straight off. I thought him a bit hipped at Fosse, but the North Sea put him right, and I left him as jolly as a grig. By the way, what was the matter with him in the summer? I gathered that he had been seedy or something, and the old man can't let him out of his sight. . . . Let's get in Angus, and talk deer."

Angus was ready to talk deer till all hours. I had fixed

the 21st for the start of the season, though the beasts were in such forward condition that we might have begun four days earlier. Angus reported that he had already seen several stags clear of velvet. But he was inclined to be doleful about our neighbours.

"My uncle Alexander is past prayin' for," said Archie. "He lives for that forest of his, and he won't have me there early in the season, for he says I have no judgment about beasts and won't listen to the stalkers. In October, you see, he has me under his own eye. He refuses to let a stag be killed unless it's a hummel or a diseased ancient. Result is, the place is crawlin' with fine stags that have begun to go back and won't perish till they're fairly moulderin'. Poor notion of a stud has my uncle Alexander. . . . What about Haripol? Who has it this year?"

When he heard he exclaimed delightedly. "I know old Claybody. Rather a good old fellow in his way, and uncommon free-handed. Rum old bird, too! He once introduced his son to me as 'The Honourable Johnson Claybody.' Fairly wallows in his peerage. You know he wanted to take the title of Lord Oxford, because he had a boy goin' up to Magdalen, but even the Heralds' College jibbed at that. But he'll never get up those Haripol hills. He's a little fat puffin' old man. I'm not very spry on my legs now, but compared to Claybody I'm a gazelle."

"He'll maybe have veesitors," said Angus.

"You bet he will. He'll have the Lodge stuffed with young men, for there are various Honourable Claybody daughters. Don't fancy they'll be much good on the hill, though."

"They will not be good, Sir Archibald," said the melancholy Angus. "There will have been some of them on the hill already. They will be no better than towrists."

"Towrists" I should explain were the poison in Angus's cup. By that name he meant people who trespassed on a deer forest during, or shortly before, the stalking season, and had not the good manners to give him notice and ask his consent. He distinguished them sharply from what he called "muntaneers," a class which he respected, for they were modest and civil folk who came usually with ropes and ice axes early in the spring, and were accustomed to feast off Angus's ham and eggs and thaw their frozen limbs by Angus's fire. If they came at other seasons it was after discussing their routes with Angus. They went where no deer could travel, and spent their time, as he said, "shamming themselves into shimneys." But the "towrist" was blatant and foolish and abundantly discourteous. He tramped, generally in a noisy party, over deer-ground, and, if remonstrated with, became truculent. A single member of the species could wreck the stalking on a beat for several days. "The next I see on Machray," said Angus, "I will be rolling down a big stone on him." Some of the Haripol guests, it appeared, were of this malign breed, and had been wandering thoughtlessly over the forest, thereby wrecking their own sport — and mine.

"They will have Alan Macnicol's heart broke," he concluded. "And Alan was saying to me that they was afful bad shots. They was shooting at a big stone and missing it. And they will have little ponies to ride on up to the tops, for the creatures is no use at walking. I hope they will fall down and break their necks."

"They can't all be bad shots," said Archie. "By the way, Dick, I forgot to tell you. You know Medina, Dominick Medina? You once told me you knew him. Well, I met him on the steamer, and he said he was going to put in a week with old Claybody."

That piece of news took the light out of the day for me. If Medina was at Haripol it was most certainly with a purpose. I had thought little about the matter since I arrived at Machray, for the place had an atmosphere of impregnable seclusion, and I seemed to have shut a door on my recent life. I had fallen into a mood of content and whole-hearted absorption in the ritual of wild sport. But now my comfort vanished. I looked up at the grim wall of hills towards Haripol and wondered what mischief was hatching behind it.

I warned Angus and Kennedy and the gillies to keep a good look-out for trespassers. Whenever one was seen, they were to get their glasses on him and follow him and report his appearance and doings to me. Then I went out alone to shoot a brace of grouse for the pot, and considered the whole matter very carefully. I had an instinct that Medina had come to these parts to have a reckoning with me, and I was determined not to shirk it. I could not go on living under such a menace; I must face it and reach a settlement. To Mary, of course, I could say nothing, and I saw no use in telling either Archie or Greenslade. It was, metaphorically, and perhaps literally, my own funeral. But next morning I did not go fishing. Instead, I stayed at home and wrote out a full account of the whole affair up to Medina's appearance at Haripol, and I set down baldly what I believed to be his purpose. This was in case I went out one day and did not return. When I finished it, I put the document in my dispatch-box, and felt easier, as a man feels when he has made his will. I only hoped the time of waiting would not be prolonged.

The 21st was a glorious blue day, with a morning haze which promised heat. What wind there was came from the southeast, so I sent Archie out on the Corrie Easain

beat, and went myself, with one gillie, to Clach Glas, which is the western peak on the north bank of the Aicill. I made a practice of doing my own stalking, and by this time I knew the ground well enough to do it safely. I saw two shootable stags, and managed to get within range of one of them, but spared him for the good of the forest, as he was a young beast whose head would improve. I had a happy and peaceful day, and found to my relief that I wasn't worrying about the future. The clear air and the great spaces seemed to have given me the placid fatalism of an Arab.

When I returned I was greeted by Mary with the news that Archie had got a stag, and that she had followed most of his stalk through the big telescope. Archie himself arrived just before dinner, very cheerful and loquacious. He found that his game leg made him slow, but he declared that he was not in the least tired. At dinner we had to listen to every detail of his day, and we had a sweep on the beast's weight, which Mary won. Afterwards in the smoking-room he told me more.

"Those infernal tailors from Haripol were out to-day. Pretty wild shots they must be. When we were lunchin' a spent bullet whistled over our heads — a long way off, to be sure, but I call it uncommon bad form. You should have heard Angus curse in Gaelic. Look here, Dick, I've a good mind to drop a line to old Claybody and ask him to caution his people. The odds are a million to one, of course, against their doin' any harm, but there's always that millionth chance. I had a feelin' to-day as if the War had started over again."

I replied that if anything of the sort happened a second time I would certainly protest, but I pretended to make light of it, as a thing only possible with that particular

brand of wind. But I realised now what Medina's plans were. He had been tramping about Haripol, getting a notion of the lie of the land, and I knew that he had a big-game hunter's quick eye for country. He had fostered the legend of wild shooting among the Haripol guests, and probably he made himself the wildest of the lot. The bullet which sang over Archie's head was a proof, but he waited on the chance of a bullet which would not miss. If a tragedy happened, every one would believe it was a pure accident, there would be heartbroken apologies, and, though Sandy and one or two others would guess the truth, nothing could be proved, and in any case it wouldn't help *me*. . . . Of course I could stalk only on the north beats of Machray, but the idea no sooner occurred to me than I dismissed it. I must end this hideous suspense. I must accept Medina's challenge and somehow or other reach a settlement.

When Angus came in for orders, I told him that I was going stalking on the Corrie-na-Sidhe beat the day after to-morrow, and I asked him to send word privately to Alan Macnicol at Haripol.

"It will be no use, sir," he groaned. "The veesitors will no heed Alan."

But I told him to send word nevertheless. I wanted to give Medina the chance he sought. It was my business to draw his fire.

Next day we slacked and fished. In the afternoon I went a little way up the hill called Clach Glas, from which I could get a view of the ground on the south side of the Aicill. It was a clear quiet day, with the wind steady in the southeast, and promising to continue there. The great green hollow of Corrie-na-Sidhe was clear in every detail; much of it looked like a tennis-court, but I knew

that what seemed smooth sward was really matted blaeberreries and hidden boulders, and that the darker patches were breast-high bracken and heather. Corrie Easain I could not see, for it was hidden by the long spur of Bheinn Fhada, over which peeped the cloven summit of Sgurr Dearg. I searched all the ground with my glasses, and picked up several lots of hinds, and a few young stags, but there was no sign of human activity. There seemed to be a rifle out, however, on Glenaicill Forest, for I heard two far-away shots towards the northeast. I lay a long time amid the fern, with bees humming around me and pipits calling, and an occasional buzzard or peregrine hovering in the blue, thinking precisely the same thoughts that I used to have in France the day before a big action. It was not exactly nervousness that I felt, but a sense that the foundations of everything had got loose, and that the world had become so insecure that I had better draw down the blinds on hoping and planning and everything, and become a log. I was very clear in my mind that next day was going to bring the crisis.

Of course I didn't want Mary to suspect, but I forgot to caution Archie, and that night at dinner, as ill luck would have it, he mentioned that Medina was at Haripol. I could see her eyes grow troubled, for I expect she had been having the same anxiety as myself those past weeks, and had been too proud to declare it. As we were going to bed she asked me point-blank what it meant. "Nothing in the world," I said. "He is a great stalker and a friend of the Claybodys. I don't suppose he has the remotest idea that I am here. Anyhow that affair is all over. He is not going to cross our path if he can help it. The one wish in his heart is to avoid us."

She appeared to be satisfied, but I don't know how much

she slept that night. I never woke till six o'clock, but when I opened my eyes I felt too big a load on my heart to let me stay in bed, so I went down to the Garden Pool and had a swim. That invigorated me, and indeed it was not easy to be depressed in that gorgeous morning, with the streamers of mist still clinging to the high tops, and the whole glen a harmony of singing birds and tumbling waters. I noticed that the wind, what there was of it, seemed to have shifted more to the east — a very good quarter for the Corrie-na-Sidhe beat.

Angus and Kennedy were waiting outside the smoking-room, and even the pessimism of the head stalker was mellowed by the weather. "I think," he said slowly, "we will be getting a sta-ag. There was a big beast on Bheinn Fhada yesterday — Kennedy seen him — a great beast he was — maybe nineteen stone, but Kennedy never right seen his head. . . . We'd better be moving on, sir."

Mary whispered in my ear. "There's no danger, Dick? You're sure?" I had never heard her voice more troubled.

"Not a scrap," I laughed. "It's an easy day and I ought to be back for tea. You'll be able to follow me all the time through the big telescope."

We started at nine. As I left, I had a picture of Green-slade sitting on a garden-seat busy with fly-casts, and Archie smoking his pipe and reading a three-days-old "Times," and Peter John going off with his nurse, and Mary looking after me with a curious tense gaze. Behind, the smoke of the chimneys was rising straight into the still air, and the finches were twittering among the Prince Charlie roses. The sight gave me a pang. I might never enter my little kingdom again. Neither wife nor friends

could help me: it was my own problem, which I must face alone.

We crossed the bridge, and began to plod upwards through a wood of hazels. In such fashion I entered upon the strangest day of my life.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW I STALKED WILDER GAME THAN DEER

I

9 A.M. TO 2.15 P.M.

OBVIOUSLY I could make no plan, and I had no clear idea in my head as to what kind of settlement I wanted with Medina. I was certain that I should find him somewhere on the hill, and that, if he got a chance, he would try to kill me. The odds were, of course, against his succeeding straight off, but escape was not what I sought — I must get rid of this menace forever. I don't think that I wanted to kill him, but indeed I never tried to analyse my feelings. I was obeying a blind instinct, and letting myself drift on the tides of fate.

Corrie-na-Sidhe is an upper corrie, separated from the Aicill valley by a curtain of rock and scree which I dare say was once the moraine of a glacier and down which the Alt-na-Sidhe tumbled in a fine chain of cascades. So steep is its fall that no fish can ascend it, so that, while at the foot it is full of sizable trout, in the corrie itself it holds nothing, as Greenslade reported, but little dark fingerlings. It was very warm as we mounted the chaos of slabs and boulders, where a very sketchy and winding track had been cut for bringing down the deer. Only the toughest kind of pony could make that ascent. Though the day was young the heat was already great, and the glen behind us swam in a glassy sheen. Kennedy, as usual, mopped his brow and grunted, but the lean Angus strode ahead as if he were on the flat.

At the edge of the corrie we halted for a spy. Deep hollows have a trick of drawing the wind, and such faint currents of air as I could detect seemed to be coming on our left rear from the northeast. Angus was positive, however, that though the south had gone out of the wind, it was pretty well due east, with no north in it, and maintained that when we were farther up the corrie we would have it fair on our left cheek. We were not long in finding beasts. There was a big drove of hinds on the right bank of the burn, and another lot, with a few small stags, on the left bank, well up on the face of Bheinn Fhada. But there was nothing shootable there.

"The big stags will be all on the high tops," said Angus. "We must be getting up to the burnhead."

It was easier said than done, for there were the hinds to be circumvented, so we had to make a long circuit far up the hill called Clonlet, which is the westernmost of the Machray tops south of the Aicill. It was rough going, for we mounted to about the three thousand feet level, and traversed the hill-side just under the upper scarp of rock. Presently we were looking down upon the cup which was the head of the corrie, and over the col could see the peak of Stob Coire Easain and the ridge of Stob Bán, both on Haripol and beyond the Reascuill. We had another spy, and made out two small lots of stags on the other side of the Alt-na-Sidhe. They were too far off to get a proper view of them, but one or two looked good beasts, and I decided to get nearer.

We had to make a cautious descent of the hill-side in case of deer lying in pockets, for the place was seamed with gullies. Before we were halfway down I got my telescope on one of the lots, and picked out a big stag with a poor head, which clearly wanted shooting. Angus agreed,

and we started down a sheltering ravine to get to the burn-side. The sight of a quarry made me forget everything else, and for the next hour and a half I hadn't a thought in the world except how to get within range of that beast. One stalk is very much like another, and I am not going to describe this. The only trouble came from a small stag in our rear, which had come over Clonlet and got the scent of our track on the hill-face. This unsettled him and he went off at a great pace towards the top of the burn. I thought at first that the brute would go up Bheinn Fhada and carry off our lot with him, but he came to a halt, changed his mind, and made for the Haripol march and the col. *the "burn" did not go up the hill-side*

After that it was plain sailing. We crawled up the right of the Alt-na-Sidhe, which was first-class cover, and then turned up a tributary gully which came down from Bheinn Fhada. Indeed the whole business was too simple to be of much interest to any one, except the man with the rifle. When I judged I was about the latitude of my stag, I crept out of the burn and reached a hillock from which I had a good view of him. The head, as I suspected, was poor — only nine points, though the horns were of the rough, thick, old Highland type, but the body was heavy, and he was clearly a back-going beast. After a wait of some twenty minutes he got up and gave me a chance at about two hundred yards, and I dropped him dead with a shot in the neck, which was the only part of him clear.

It was for me the first stag of the season, and it is always a pleasant moment when the tension relaxes and you light your pipe and look around you. As soon as the gralloch was over I proposed lunch, and we found for the purpose a little nook by a spring. We were within a few hundred yards of the Haripol march, which there does not

run along the watershed but crosses the corrie about half a mile below the col. In the old days of sheep there had been a fence, the decaying posts of which could be observed a little way off on a knoll. Between the fence and the col lay some very rough ground, where the Alt-na-Sidhe had its source, ground so broken that it was impossible, without going a good way up the hill, to see from it the watershed ridge.

I finished Mary's stuffed scones and ginger biscuits, and had a drink of whisky and spring water, while Angus and Kennedy ate their lunch a few yards off in the heather. I was just lighting my pipe, when a sound made me pause with the match in my hand. A rifle bullet sang over my head. It was not very near — fifty feet or so above me, and a little to the left.

"The tamned towrists!" I heard Angus exclaim.

I knew it was Medina as certainly as if I had seen him. He was somewhere in the rough ground between the Haripol march and the col — probably close to the col, for the sound of the report seemed to come from a good way off. He could not have been aiming at me, for I was perfectly covered, but he must have seen me when I stalked the stag. He had decided that his chance was not yet come, and the shot was camouflage — to keep up the reputation of Haripol for wild shooting.

"It would be the staggie that went over the march," grunted Angus. "The towrists — to be shooting at such a wee beast!"

I had suddenly made up my mind. I would give Medina the opportunity he sought. I would go and look for him.

I got up and stretched my legs. "I'm going to try a stalk on my own," I told Angus. "I'll go over to Corrie Easain. You had better pull this beast down to the burn-

side, and then fetch the pony. You might send Hughie and the other pony up Glenaicill to the Mad Burn. If I get a stag I'll gralloch him and get him down somehow to the burn, so tell Hughie to look out for my signal. I'll wave a white handkerchief. The wind is backing round to the north, Angus. It should be all right for Corrie Easain, if I take it from south."

"It would be better for Sgurr Dearg," said Angus, "but that's ower far. Have you the cartridges, sir?"

"Plenty," I said, patting a side pocket. "Give me that spare rope, Kennedy. I'll want it for hauling down my stag, if I get one."

I put my little .240 into its cover, nodded to the men, and turned down the gully to the main burn. I wasn't going to appear on the bare hill-side so long as it was possible for Medina to have a shot at me. But soon a ridge shut off the view from the Haripol ground, and I then took a slant up the face of Bheinn Fhada.

Mary had spent most of the morning at the big telescope in the library window. She saw us reach the rim of the corrie and lost us when we moved up the side of Clonlet. We came into view again far up the corrie, and she saw the stalk and the death of the stag. Then she went to luncheon, but hastened back in the middle of it in time to see me scrambling alone among the screes of Bheinn Fhada. At first she was reassured because she thought I was coming home. But when she realised that I was mounting higher and was making for Corrie Easain her heart sank, and, when I had gone out of view, she could do nothing but range miserably about the garden.

II

2.15 P.M. TO ABOUT 5 P.M.

It was very hot on Bheinn Fhada, for I was out of the wind, but when I reached the ridge and looked down on Corrie Easain I found a fair breeze, which had certainly more north than east in it. There was not a cloud in the sky, and every top for miles round stood out clear, except the Haripol peaks which were shut off by the highest part of the ridge I stood on. Corrie Easain lay far below — not a broad cup like Corrie-na-Sidhe, but a deep gash in the hills, inclined at such an angle that the stream in it was nothing but white water. We called it the Mad Burn — its Gaelic name, I think, was the Alt-a-mhuillin — and halfway up and just opposite me a tributary, the Red Burn, came down from the cliffs of Sgurr Dearg. I could see the northern peak of that mountain, a beautiful cone of rock, rising like the Matterhorn from its glaxis of scree.

I argued that Medina would have seen me going up Bheinn Fhada and would assume that I was bound for Corrie Easain. He would re-cross the col and make for the Haripol side of the *beallach* which led from that corrie to the Reascuill. Now I wanted to keep to the higher ground, where I could follow his movements, so it was my aim to get to the watershed ridge looking down on Haripol before he did. The wind was a nuisance, for it was blowing from me and would move any deer towards him, thereby giving him a clue to my whereabouts. So I thought that if I could once locate him, I must try to get the lee side of him. At that time I think I had a vague notion of driving him towards Machray.

I moved at my best pace along the east face of Bheinn Fhada towards the *beallach* — which was a deep rift in the

grey rock-curtain through which deer could pass. My only feeling was excitement, such as I had never known before in any stalk. I slipped and sprawled among the slabs, slithered over the scree, had one or two awkward traverses round the butt-end of cliffs, but in about twenty minutes I was at the point where the *massif* of Bheinn Fhada joined the watershed ridge. The easy way was now to get on to the ridge, but I dared not appear on the sky-line, so I made a troublesome journey along the near side of the ridge-wall, sometimes out on the face of sheer precipices, but more often involved in a chaos of loose boulders which were the *débris* of the upper rocks. I was forced pretty far down, and eventually struck the *beallach* path about five hundred feet below the summit.

At the crest I found I had no view of the Reascuill valley — only a narrow corrie blocked by a shoulder of hill and the bald top of Stob Coire Easain beyond. A prospect I must have, so I turned east along the watershed ridge in the direction of Sgurr Dearg. I was by this time very warm, for I had come at a brisk pace; I had a rifle to carry, and had Angus's rope round my shoulders like a Swiss guide; I was wearing an old grey suit, which, with bluish stockings, made me pretty well invisible on that hill-side. Presently as I mounted the ridge, keeping of course under the sky-line, I came to a place where a lift of rock enabled me to clear the spurs and command a mile or so of the Reascuill.

The place was on the sky-line, bare and exposed, and I crawled to the edge where I could get a view. Below me, after a few hundred yards of rocks and scree, I saw a long tract of bracken and deep heather sweeping down to the stream. Medina, I made sure, was somewhere thereabouts, watching the ridge. I calculated that with his re-

crossing of the col at the head of Corrie-na-Sidhe and his working round the south end of Bheinn Fhada, he could not have had time to get to the *beallach*, or near the *beallach*, before me, and must still be on the lower ground. Indeed I hoped to catch sight of him, for, while I was assured he was pursuing me, he could not know that I was after him, and might be off his guard.

But there was no sign of life in that sunny stretch of green and purple, broken by the grey of boulders. I searched it with my glass and could see no movement except pipits, and a curlew by a patch of bog. Then it occurred to me to show myself. He must be made to know that I had accepted his challenge.

I stood up straight on the edge of the steep, and decided to remain standing till I had counted fifty. It was an insane thing to do, I daresay, but I was determined to force the pace. . . . I had got to forty-one without anything happening. Then a sudden instinct made me crouch and step aside. That movement was my salvation. There was a sound like a twanged fiddle-string, and a bullet passed over my left shoulder. I felt the wind of it on my cheek.

The next second I was on my back wriggling below the sky-line. Once there I got to my feet and ran — up the ridge on my left to get a view from higher ground. The shot, so far as I could judge, had come from well below and a little to the east of where I had been standing. I found another knuckle of rock, and crept to the edge of it, so that I looked from between two boulders into the glen.

The place was still utterly quiet. My enemy was hidden there, probably not half a mile off, but there was nothing to reveal his presence. The light wind stirred the bog cotton, a merlin sailed across to Stob Coire Easain, a

raven croaked in the crags, but these were the only sounds. There was not even a sign of deer.

My glass showed that halfway down an old ewe was feeding — one of those melancholy beasts which stray into a forest from adjacent sheep-ground, and lead a precarious life among the rocks, lean and matted and wild, till some gillie cuts their throats. They are far sharper-eyed and quicker of hearing than a stag, and an unmitigated curse to the stalker. The brute was feeding on a patch of turf near a big stretch of bracken, and suddenly I saw her raise her head and stare. It was the first time I had ever felt well disposed towards a sheep.

She was curious about something in a shallow gully which flanked the brackens, and so was I. I kept my glass glued on her, and saw her toss her disreputable head, stamp her foot, and then heard her whistle through her nose. This was a snag Medina could not have reckoned with. He was clearly in that gully, working his way upward in its cover, unwitting that the ewe was giving him away. I argued that he must want to reach the high ground as soon as possible. He had seen me on the ridge, and must naturally conclude that I had beaten a retreat. My first business, therefore, was to reassure him.

I got my rifle out of its cover, which I stuffed into my pocket. There was a little patch of gravel just on the lip of the gully, and I calculated that he would emerge beside it, under the shade of a blaeberry-covered stone. I guessed right . . . I saw first an arm, and then a shoulder part the rushes, and presently a face which peered up-hill. My glass showed me that the face was Medina's, very red, and dirty from contact with the peaty soil. He slowly reached for his glass, and began to scan the heights.

I don't know what my purpose was at this time, if in-

deed I had any purpose. I didn't exactly mean to kill him, I think, though I felt it might come to that. Vaguely I wanted to put him out of action, to put the fear of God into him, and make him come to terms. Of further consequences I never thought. But now I had one clear intention — to make him understand that I accepted his challenge.

I put a bullet neatly into the centre of the patch of gravel, and then got my glass on it. He knew the game all right. In a second like a weasel he was back in the gully.

I reckoned that now I had my chance. Along the ridge I went, mounting fast, and keeping always below the skyline. I wanted to get to the lee side of him and so be able to stalk him up wind, and I thought that I had an opportunity now to turn the head of the Reascuill by one of the steep corries which descend from Sgurr Dearg. Looking back, it all seems very confused and amateurish, for what could I hope to do, even if I had the lee-side, beyond killing or wounding him? and I had a chance of that as long as I had the upper ground. But in the excitement of the chase the mind does not take long views, and I was enthralled by the crazy sport of the thing. I did not feel any fear, because I was not worrying about consequences.

Soon I came to the higher part of the ridge and saw frowning above me the great rock face of Sgurr Dearg. I saw, too, a thing I had forgotten. There was no way up that mountain direct from the ridge, for the tower rose as perpendicular as a house-wall. To surmount it a man must traverse on one side or the other — on the Machray side by a scree slope, or on the Haripol side by a deep gully which formed the top of the corrie into which I was now looking. Across that corrie was the first of the great buttresses which Sgurr Dearg sends down to the Reascuill.

It was the famous Pinnacle Ridge (as mountaineers called it); I had climbed it three weeks before and found it pretty stiff; but then I had kept the ridge all the way from the valley bottom, and I did not see any practicable road up the corrie face of it, which seemed nothing but slabs and rotten rocks, while the few chimneys had ugly overhangs.

I lay flat and reconnoitred. What was Medina likely to do? After my shot he could not follow up the ridge — the cover was too poor on the upper slopes. I reasoned that he would keep on in the broken ground up the glen till he reached this corrie, and try to find a road to the high ground either by the corrie itself or by one of the spurs. In that case it was my business to wait for him. But first I thought I had better put a fresh clip in my magazine, for the shot I had fired had been the last cartridge in the old clip.

It was now that I made an appalling discovery. I had felt my pockets and told Angus that I had plenty of cartridges. So I had, but they didn't fit. . . . I remembered that two days before I had lent Archie my .240 and had been shooting with a Mannlicher. What I had in my pocket were Mannlicher clips left over from that day. . . . I might chuck my rifle away, for it was no more use than a poker.

At first I was stunned by the fatality. Here was I, engaged in a duel on a wild mountain with one of the best shots in the world, and I had lost my gun! The sensible course would have been to go home. There was plenty of time for that, and long before Medina reached the ridge I could be in cover in the gorge of the Mad Burn. But that way out of it never occurred to me. I had chosen to set the course, and the game must be played out here and now. But I confess I was pretty well in despair and could

see no plan. I think I had a faint hope of protracting the thing till dark and then trusting to my hill-craft to get even with him, but I had an unpleasant feeling that he was not likely to oblige me with so long a delay.

I forced myself to think, and decided that Medina would either come up the corrie or take the steep spur which formed the right-hand side of it and ran down to the Reascuill. The second route would give him cover, but also render him liable to a surprise at close quarters if I divined his intention, for I might suddenly confront him four yards off at the top of one of the pitches. He would therefore prefer the corrie, which was magnificently broken up with rocks, and seamed with ravines, and at the same time gave a clear view of all the higher ground.

With my face in a clump of louse-wort I raked the place with my glass; and to my delight saw deer feeding about halfway down in the right-hand corner. Medina could not ascend the corrie without disturbing these deer — a batch of some thirty hinds, with five small and two fairish stags among them. Therefore I was protected from that side, and had only the ridge to watch.

But as I lay there I thought of another plan. Medina, I was pretty certain, would try the corrie first, and would not see the deer till he was well inside it, for they were on a kind of platform which hid them from below. Opposite me across the narrow corrie rose the great black wall of the Pinnacle Ridge, with the wind blowing from me towards it. I remembered a trick which Angus had taught me — how a stalker might have his wind carried against the face of an opposite mountain and then, so to speak, reflected from it and brought back to his own side, so that deer below him would get it and move away from it up *towards him*. If I let my scent be carried to the Pinnacle

Ridge and diverted back, it would move the deer on the platform up the corrie towards me. It would be a faint wind, so they would move slowly away from it — no doubt towards a gap under the tower of Sgurr Dearg which led to the little corrie at the head of the Red Burn. We never stalked that corrie, because it was impossible to get a stag out of it without cutting him up, so the place was a kind of sanctuary to which disturbed deer would naturally resort.

I stood on the sky-line, being confident that Medina could not yet be within sight, and let the wind, which was now stronger and nearly due north, ruffle my hair. I did this for about five minutes, and then lay down to watch the result, with my glass on the deer. Presently I saw them become restless, first the hinds and then the small stags lifting their heads and looking towards the Pinnacle Ridge. Soon a little fellow trotted a few yards up-hill; then a couple of hinds moved after him; and then by a sudden and simultaneous impulse the whole party began to drift up the corrie. It was a quiet steady advance; they were not scared, only a little doubtful. I saw with satisfaction that their objective seemed to be the gap which led over to the Red Burn.

Medina must see this and would assume that wherever I was I was not ahead of the deer. He might look for me on the other side, but more likely would follow the beasts so as to get the high ground. Once there he could see my movements, whether I was on the slopes of the Pinnacle Ridge, or down on the Machray side. He would consider no doubt that his marksmanship was so infinitely better than mine that he had only to pick me out from the landscape to make an end of the business.

What I exactly intended I do not know. I had a fleeting

notion of lying hidden and surprising him, but the chances against that were about a million to one, and even if I got him at close quarters he was armed and I was not. I moved a little to the right so as to keep my wind from the deer, and waited with a chill beginning to creep over my spirit. . . . My watch told me it was five o'clock. Mary and Peter John would be having tea among the Prince Charlie roses, and Greenslade and Archie coming up from the river. It would be heavenly at Machray now among greenery and the cool airs of evening. Up here there was loveliness enough, from the stars of butterwort and grass of Parnassus by the well-heads to the solemn tops of Sgurr Dearg, the colour of stormy waves against a faint turquoise sky. But I knew now that the beauty of earth depends on the eye of the beholder, for suddenly the clean airy world around me had grown leaden and stifling.

III

5 P.M. TO ABOUT 7.30 P.M.

It was a good hour before he came. I had guessed rightly, and he had made the deduction I hoped for. He was following the deer towards the gap, assuming that I was on the Machray side. I was in a rushy hollow at a junction of the main ridge and the spur I have mentioned, and I could see him clearly as, with immense circumspection and the use of every scrap of cover, he made his way up the corrie. Once he was over the watershed, I would command him from the higher ground and have the wind to my vantage. I had some hope now, for I ought to be able to keep him on the hill till the light failed, when my superior local knowledge would come to my aid. He must be growing tired, I reflected, for he had had far more

ground to cover. For myself I felt that I could go on forever.

That might have been the course of events but for a second sheep. Sgurr Dearg had always been noted for possessing a few sheep even on its high rocks — infernal tattered outlaws, strays originally from some decent flock, but now to all intents a new species, unclassified by science. How they lived and bred I knew not, but there was a legend of many a good stalk ruined by their diabolical cunning. I heard something between a snort and a whistle behind me, and, screwing my head round, saw one of these confounded animals poised on a rock and looking in my direction. It could see me perfectly, too, for on that side I had no cover.

I lay like a mouse watching Medina. He was about half a mile off, almost on the top of the corrie, and he had halted for a rest and a spy. I prayed fervently that he would not see the sheep.

He heard it. The brute started its whistling and coughing, and a novice could have seen that it suspected something and knew where that something was. I observed him get his glass on my lair, though from the place where he was he could see nothing but rushes. Then he seemed to make up his mind and suddenly disappeared from view.

I knew what he was after. He had dropped into a scaur, which would take him to the sky-line and enable him to come down on me from above, while he himself would be safe from my observation.

There was nothing to do but to clear out. The spur dropping to the Reascuill seemed to give me the best chance, so I started off, crouching and crawling, to get round the nose of it and on to the steep glen-ward face. It was a miserable job till I had turned the corner, for I ex-

pected every moment a bullet in my back. Nothing happened, however, and soon I was slithering down awesome slabs on to insecure ledges of heather. I am a fairly experienced mountaineer, and a lover of rock, but I dislike vegetation mixed up with a climb, and I had too much of it now. There was perhaps a thousand feet of that spur, and I think I must hold the speed record for its descent. Scratched, bruised, and breathless, I came to anchor on a bed of screes, with the infant Reascuill tumbling below me, and beyond it, a quarter of a mile off, the black cliffs of the Pinnacle Ridge.

But what was my next step to be? The position was reversed. Medina was above me with a rifle, and my own weapon was useless. He must find out the road I had taken and would be after me like a flame. . . . It was no good going down the glen; in the open ground he would get the chance of twenty shots. It was no good sticking to the spur or the adjacent ridge, for the cover was bad. I could not hide for long in the corrie. . . . Then I looked towards the Pinnacle Ridge and considered that, once I got into those dark couloirs, I might be safe. The Psalmist had turned to the hills for his help — I had better look to the rocks.

I had a quarter of a mile of open to cross, and a good deal more if I was to reach the ridge at a point easy of ascent. There were chimneys in front of me, deep black gashes, but my recollection of them was that they had looked horribly difficult, and had been plentifully supplied with overhangs. Supposing I got into one of them and stuck. Medina would have me safe enough. . . . But I couldn't wait to think. With an ugly cold feeling in my insides I got into the ravine of the burn, and had a long drink from a pool. Then I started down-stream, keeping

close to the right-hand bank, which mercifully was high and dotted with rowan saplings. And as I went I was always turning my head to see behind and above me what I feared.

I think Medina, who of course did not know about my rifle, may have suspected a trap, for he came on slowly, and when I caught sight of him it was not on the spur I had descended but farther up the corrie. Two things I now realised. One was that I could not make the easy end of the Pinnacle Ridge without exposing myself on some particularly bare ground. The other was that to my left in the Ridge was a deep gully which looked climbable. Moreover the foot of that gully was not a hundred yards from the burn, and the mouth was so deep that a man would find shelter as soon as he entered it.

For the moment I could not see Medina, and I don't think he had yet caught sight of me. There was a trickle of water coming down from the gully to the burn, and that gave me an apology for cover. I ground my nose into the flowe-moss and let the water trickle down my neck, as I squirmed my way up, praying hard that my enemy's eyes might be sealed.

I think I had got about halfway, when a turn gave me a view of the corrie, and there was Medina halted and looking towards me. By the mercy of Providence my boots were out of sight, and my head a little lower than my shoulders, so that I suppose among the sand and gravel and rushes I must have been hard to detect. Had he used his telescope I think he must have spotted me, though I am not certain. I saw him staring. I saw him half raise his rifle to his shoulder, while I heard my heart thump. Then he lowered his weapon, and moved out of sight.

Two minutes later I was inside the gully.

The place ran in like a cave with a sandy floor, and then came a steep pitch of rock, while the sides narrowed into a chimney. This was not very difficult. I swung myself up into the second storey, and found that the cleft was so deep that the back wall was about three yards from the opening, so that I climbed in almost complete darkness and in perfect safety from view. This went on for about fifty feet, and then, after a rather awkward chockstone, I came to a fork. The branch on the left looked hopeless, while that on the right seemed to offer some chances. But I stopped to consider, for I remembered something.

I remembered that this was the chimney which I had prospected three weeks before when I climbed the Pinnacle Ridge. I had prospected it from above, and had come to the conclusion that, while the left fork *might* be climbed, the right was impossible or nearly so, for, modestly as it began, it ran out into a fearsome crack on the face of the cliff, and did not become a chimney again till after a hundred feet of unclimbable rotten granite.

So I tried the left fork, which looked horribly unpromising. The first trouble was a chockstone, which I managed to climb round, and then the confounded thing widened and became perpendicular. I remembered that I had believed a way could be found by taking to the right-hand face, and in the excitement of the climb I forgot all precautions. It simply did not occur to me that this face route might bring me in sight of eyes which at all costs I must avoid.

It was not an easy business, for there was an extreme poverty of decent holds. But I have done worse pitches in my time, and had I not had a rifle to carry (I had no sling), might have thought less of it. Very soon I was past

the worst, and saw my way to returning to the chimney, which had once more become reasonable. I stopped for a second to prospect the route, with my foot on a sound ledge, my right elbow crooked round a jag of rock, and my left hand, which held the rifle, stretched out so that my fingers could test the soundness of a certain handhold.

Suddenly I felt the power go out of those fingers. The stone seemed to crumble and splinters flew into my eye. There was a crashing of echoes, which drowned the noise of my rifle as it clattered down the precipice. I remember looking at my hand spread-eagled against the rock, and wondering why it looked so strange.

The light was just beginning to fail, so it must have been about half-past seven.

IV

7.30 P.M. AND ONWARDS

Had anything of the sort happened to me during an ordinary climb I should beyond doubt have lost my footing with the shock and fallen. But, being pursued, I suppose my nerves were keyed to a perpetual expectancy, and I did not slip. The fear of a second bullet saved my life. In a trice I was back in the chimney, and the second bullet spent itself harmlessly on the granite.

Mercifully it was now easier going — honest knee-and-back work, which I could manage in spite of my shattered fingers. I climbed feverishly with a cold sweat on my brow, but every muscle was in order, and I knew I would make no mistake. The chimney was deep, and a ledge of rock hid me from my enemy below. . . . Presently I squeezed through a gap, swung myself up with my right

hand and my knees to a shelf, and saw that the difficulties were over. A shallow gully, filled with screes, led up to the crest of the ridge. It was the place I had looked down on three weeks before.

I examined my left hand, which was in a horrid mess. The top of my thumb was blown off, and the two top joints of my middle and third fingers were smashed to pulp. I felt no pain in them, though they were dripping blood, but I had a queer numbness in my left shoulder. I managed to bind the hand up in a handkerchief, where it made a gory bundle. Then I tried to collect my wits.

Medina was coming up the chimney after me. He knew I had no rifle. He was, as I had heard, an expert cragsman, and he was the younger man by at least ten years. My first thought was to make for the upper part of the Pinnacle Ridge, and try to hide or to elude him somehow till the darkness. But he could follow me in the transparent Northern night, and I must soon weaken from loss of blood. I could not hope to put sufficient distance between us for safety, and he had his deadly rifle. Somewhere in the night or in the dawning he would get me. No, I must stay and fight it out.

Could I hold the chimney? I had no weapon but stones, but I might be able to prevent a man ascending by those intricate rocks. In the chimney at any rate there was cover, and he could not use his rifle. . . . But would he try the chimney? Why should he not go round by the lower slopes of the Pinnacle Ridge and come on me from above?

It was the dread of his bullets that decided me. My one passionate longing was for cover. I might get him in a place where his rifle was useless and I had a chance to

use my greater muscular strength. I did not care what happened to me provided I got my hands on him. Behind all my fear and confusion and pain there was now a cold fury of rage.

So I slipped back into the chimney and descended it to where it turned slightly to the left past a nose of rock. Here I had cover, and could peer down into the darkening deeps of the great couloir.

A purple haze filled the corrie, and the Machray tops were like dull amethysts. The sky was a cloudy blue sprinkled with stars, and mingled with the last flush of sunset was the first tide of the afterglow. . . . At first all was quiet in the gully. I heard the faint trickle of stones which are always falling in such a place, and once the croak of a hungry raven. . . . Was my enemy there? Did he know of the easier route up the Pinnacle Ridge? Would he not assume that if I could climb the cleft he could follow, and would he feel any dread of a man with no gun and a shattered hand?

Then from far below came a sound I recognised — iron hobnails on rock. I began to collect loose stones and made a little pile of such ammunition beside me. . . . I realised that Medina had begun the ascent of the lower pitches. Every breach in the stillness was perfectly clear — the steady scraping in the chimney, the fall of a fragment of rock as he surmounted the lower chockstone, the scraping again as he was forced out on to the containing wall. The light must have been poor, but the road was plain. Of course I saw nothing of him, for a bulge prevented me, but my ears told me the story. Then there was silence. I realised that he had come to the place where the chimney forked.

I had my stones ready, for I hoped to get him when he

was driven out on the face at the overhang, the spot where I had been when he fired.

The sounds began again, and I waited in a desperate choking calm. In a minute or two would come the crisis. I remember that the afterglow was on the Machray tops and made a pale light in the corrie below. In the cleft there was still a kind of dim twilight. Any moment I expected to see a dark thing in movement fifty feet below, which would be Medina's head.

But it did not come. The noise of scraped rock still continued, but it seemed to draw no nearer. Then I realised that I had misjudged the situation. Medina had taken the right-hand fork. He was bound to, unless he had made, like me, an earlier reconnaissance. My route in the half-light must have looked starkly impossible.

The odds were now on my side. No man in the fast-gathering darkness could hope to climb the cliff face and rejoin that chimney after its interruption. He would go on till he stuck — and then it would not be too easy to get back. I reascended my own cleft, for I had a notion that I might traverse across the space between the two forks, and find a vantage point for a view.

Very slowly and painfully, for my left arm was beginning to burn like fire and my left shoulder and neck to feel strangely paralysed, I wriggled across the steep face till I found a sort of *gendarme* of rock, beyond which the cliff fell smoothly to the lip of the other fork. The great gully below was now a pit of darkness, but the afterglow still lingered on this upper section and I saw clearly where Medina's chimney lay, where it narrowed and where it ran out. I fixed myself so as to prevent myself falling, for I feared I was becoming light-headed. Then I remembered Angus's rope, got it unrolled, took a coil round my waist, and made a hitch over the *gendarme*.

There was a smothered cry from below, and suddenly came the ring of metal on stone, and then a clatter of something falling. I knew what it meant. Medina's rifle had gone the way of mine and lay now among the boulders at the chimney foot. At last we stood on equal terms, and, befogged as my mind was, I saw that nothing now could stand between us and a settlement.

It seemed to me that I saw something moving in the half-light. If it was Medina, he had left the chimney and was trying the face. That way I knew there was no hope. He would be forced back, and surely would soon realise the folly of it and descend. Now that his rifle had gone my hatred had ebbed. I seemed only to be watching a fellow-mountaineer in a quandary.

He could not have been forty feet from me, for I heard his quick breathing. He was striving hard for holds, and the rock must have been rotten, for there was a continuous dropping of fragments, and once a considerable boulder hurtled down the couloir.

"Go back, man," I cried instinctively. "Back to the chimney. You can't get further that way."

I suppose he heard me, for he made a more violent effort, and I thought I could see him sprawl at a foothold which he missed, and then swing out on his hands. He was evidently weakening, for I heard a sob of weariness. If he could not regain the chimney, there was three hundred feet of a fall to the boulders at the foot.

"Medina," I yelled, "I've a rope. I'm going to send it down to you. Get your arm in the loop."

I made a noose at the end with my teeth and my right hand, working with a maniac's fury.

"I'll fling it straight out," I cried. "Catch it when it falls to you."

My cast was good enough, but he let it pass, and the rope dangled down into the abyss.

"Oh, damn it, man," I roared, "you can trust me. We'll have it out when I get you safe. You'll break your neck if you hang there."

Again I threw, and suddenly the rope tightened. He believed my word, and I think that was the greatest compliment ever paid me in all my days.

"Now you're held," I cried. "I've got a belay here. Try and climb back into the chimney."

He understood and began to move. But his arms and legs must have been numb with fatigue, for suddenly that happened which I feared. There was a wild slipping and plunging, and then he swung out limply, missing the chimney, right on to the smooth wall of the cliff.

There was nothing for it but to haul him back. I knew Angus's ropes too well to have any confidence in them, and I had only the one good hand. The rope ran through a groove of stone which I had covered with my coat, and I hoped to work it even with a single arm by moving slowly upwards.

"I'll pull you up," I yelled, "but for God's sake give me some help. Don't hang on the rope more than you need."

My loop was a large one and I think he had got both arms through it. He was a monstrous weight, limp and dead as a sack, for though I could feel him scraping and kicking at the cliff face, the rock was too smooth for fissures. I held the rope with my feet planted against boulders, and wrought till my muscles cracked. Inch by inch I was drawing him in, till I realised the danger.

The rope was grating on the sharp brink beyond the

chimney and might at any moment be cut by a knife-edge.

"Medina" — my voice must have been like a wild animal's scream — "this is too dangerous. I'm going to let you down a bit so that you can traverse. There's a sort of ledge down there. For Heaven's sake go canny with this rope."

I slipped the belay from the *gendarme*, and hideously difficult it was. Then I moved farther down to a little platform nearer the chimney. This gave me about six extra yards.

"Now," I cried, when I had let him slip down, "a little to your left. Do you feel the ledge?"

He had found some sort of foothold, and for a moment there was a relaxation of the strain. The rope swayed to my right towards the chimney. I began to see a glimmer of hope.

"Cheer up," I cried. "Once in the chimney you're safe. Sing out when you reach it."

The answer out of the darkness was a sob. I think giddiness must have overtaken him, or that atrophy of muscle which is the peril of rock-climbing. Suddenly the rope scorched my fingers and a shock came on my middle which dragged me to the very edge of the abyss.

I still believe that I could have saved him if I had had the use of both my hands, for I could have guided the rope away from that fatal knife-edge. I knew it was hopeless, but I put every ounce of strength and will into the effort to swing it with its burden into the chimney. He gave me no help, for I think — I hope — that he was unconscious. Next second the strands had parted, and I fell back with a sound in my ears which I pray God I may never hear again — the sound of a body rebounding dully

from crag to crag, and then a long soft rumbling of screes like a snowslip.

I managed to crawl the few yards to the anchorage of the *gendarme* before my senses left me. There in the morning Mary and Angus found me.

THE END

